

Eddie, The Junior Year

Chapter Six The Big Spring Season

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The week after tryouts, the team has only three days to get ready for the first meet of the season. Mr. Frazier, however, is not worried. Most of the team members were running with the indoor track team, and are more ready than ever for the Spring season. The team is the strongest that it has ever been. There is no question of whether Northside will win the upcoming meet against Centerville High School. The question is whether they can take first, second, and third place in every event.

The sprinters are ready. Eddie and Kathy will not be beaten in the 100-yard dash. Mark and Paula will take the 220-yard dash. Mark will put McCutchen's brain through a blender sometime during the meet, immobilizing Centerville's best sprinter. No one will come close to Braden or Erika in the 440-yard dash.

Mr. Zunde is planning on having Eddie throw the discus, just to make a point. Word travels fast among teams, so a good showing in the first meet is imperative. Mr. Zunde has his own form of psychological warfare, and ushering in the season by having an athlete throw the discus almost 200 feet is definitely in his arsenal.

The Centerville coach, Mr. Ruff, will likely find out that Mr. Frazier really did make a trip to Nigeria to pick up Akinmola. Mr. Ruff will also get to see Paula's sister, Amber Amy, perform for the first time. Mr. Frazier is reported to have rescued Amber from the Amazon Jungle last Summer, just as he promised. Paula is very grateful. She just could not bear the thought of her sister, who was all by herself in the Amazon, dodging spears, and fighting off snakes and piranha. Once Mr. Ruff gets the scoop on Mr. Frazier's activities, Mr. Parker, the Henderson coach, will certainly know by the next day. Mr. Ruff and Mr. Parker are sure to shift the rumor mill into high gear.

Wednesday morning before the meet brings an interesting development. By now, everyone knows that, when the principal, Mr. Crum, plans on interfering with athletics, he calculates every move with great precision. And, so goes the script. Wednesday, after the usual morning announcements, the secretary announces over the loudspeaker, "will Axel Braden and Mark Svoboda, please report to the principal's office immediately." Eddie tells Mark and Braden, "I guess Mr. Crum hit a dead end with me and Kathy. It looks like it's your turn. Good luck, bro!" Mark and Braden walk out, and pass by the seats that are usually occupied by Jimmy O'Brien and Chuckie. Those seats have been vacant for a few days.

Mark and Braden arrive in the school lobby. They are greeted outside the administration office by Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier, who heard the announcement and invited themselves to the meeting. Hoping for an answer, Braden asks, "what did we do now?" Mr. Zunde replies, "your guess is as good as mine. But, it looks to me like he's calling the train wreck crew into his office." Mark adds, "O'Brien hasn't been to school since they took him away." Braden mentions, "neither has Chuckie." Mr. Zunde comments, "well, that's certainly good news for the track team."

The coaches walk into the administration area, and Mr. Zunde asks Mrs. Marlowe, the secretary, "what does Mr. Crum want this time?" Mrs. Marlowe replies, "I'm not exactly sure, but Mr. O'Brien is in his office right now." Mr. Frazier tells Mr. Zunde, "it looks like you hit the nail on the head with that one. It's probably about the collision on the track." Mr. Zunde jokingly tells Mr. Frazier, "this must be about something really serious. Perhaps Mr. O'Brien saw Mark and Braden chewing gum in class. Or, it could be that they've used the restroom without permission." Mrs. Marlowe, finally understanding the dynamics between Mr. Crum and Mr. Zunde, laughs at Mr. Zunde's comment.

Mrs. Marlowe phones Mr. Crum, and lets him know that Axel Braden and Mark Svoboda have arrived. Mrs. Marlowe tells the group that they may go into Mr. Crum's office. Mr. Crum is still in his cast with a broken leg that he incurred when he ran into the discus, so he is still not moving very well.

Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier lead the way, and see Mr. O'Brien sitting in a chair, with his son Jimmy next to him. Jimmy is wearing a cervical collar due to his sprained neck. Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier, with their arms crossed, stand in their usual place near the bookshelf. Today, Mr. Crum does not question Mr. Zunde or Mr. Frazier's presence. Mark and Braden stand in front of the door with a stance that would give someone the impression that they are the school's bouncers. Everyone now knows exactly what this meeting is about.

Mr. Crum begins the meeting by announcing, "it has come to my attention that there has been another so-called accident on the track last week. Mr. O'Brien would like to give all of you an update on Jimmy's condition. He would like Mr. Svoboda and Mr. Braden to hear this information first hand."

Turning to Mark and Braden, Mr. Crum tells them, "that's why you two guys are here." Braden tells Mr. Crum, "well, I know we're not here to see a new desk, 'cause you ain't got one yet. It looks like the one that Eddie's father busted up is still here, and it's still broken." Mr. Crum slams a folder onto his desk, wanting to, but not wanting to, engage Braden.

Mr. O'Brien opens by telling everyone present, "Jimmy suffered a very bad concussion on the track last week. He also has three broken ribs and a badly sprained neck. As of today, he still cannot think properly. They did multiple x-rays of his brain, and said that they couldn't see anything." Mr. Zunde asks, "so, they said they couldn't see anything in there?" Mr. O'Brien replies, "exactly." Mr. Zunde comments, "that doesn't surprise me." Mr. O'Brien, totally missing Mr. Zunde's innuendo, continues to explain, "the doctors also say that Jimmy has severe internal contusions." Mark asks, "what's that?" Mr. O'Brien explains, "he has bruising inside his body." Braden mentions, "well, he shouldn't have had his ass on the track." Mr. Crum exclaims, "that is not the issue, Mr. Braden! And, please watch your language!"

Mr. Frazier tells Mr. Crum, "excuse me, sir, but Braden has a valid point." Mr. Crum brazenly asks, "and, exactly what is his point, Mr. Frazier?" Mr. Frazier tells Mr. Crum, "Jimmy was cut from the team before we went out to the track on the first day of tryouts. I told him he was cut, and that he should head to the locker room. I'm waiting for anyone's explanation of why he was on the track at all after I cut him. And, don't tell me he didn't know that he was cut. Everyone trying out for the team heard me tell him that he was cut, and they watched him as he headed to the lockers."

Mr. Crum asks Mr. Frazier, "why did you cut him before tryouts began?" Mr. Zunde steps in, and answers, "Jimmy is a danger to himself and everyone else on the track. That's why. It's my decision, and I am standing by it." Mr. O'Brien lectures Mr. Zunde, telling him, "I don't think that's very fair. Do you?" Mr. Zunde replies, "judge for yourself. The evidence for my decision is sitting right next to you."

Mr. O'Brien, belaboring the issue, remarks, "well, Jimmy still should have been given a chance." Mr. Zunde, standing his ground, replies, "no, he shouldn't have. Maybe he should try out for football instead. Perhaps they could use Jimmy for the football." Mr. O'Brien is not exactly Mr.

Zunde's favorite teacher, and Mr. Zunde has no problem letting it be known.

Mr. Frazier interrupts, and exclaims, "will somebody please tell me why Jimmy was on the track?" Mr. Crum asks Jimmy, "Jimmy, did you know that you were cut?" Jimmy reluctantly replies, "well, yeah." Mr. Frazier exclaims with unmistakable anger, "then, please tell me why you were out on the track!" Jimmy starts sobbing, and doesn't answer. Mr. Crum mentions, "well, that is not the main issue right now." Standing his ground, Mr. Frazier exclaims, "yes, it is! That's the only issue right now! I want to know why Jimmy was on that track!"

Getting nowhere with Jimmy, Mr. Frazier asks Mr. O'Brien, "did you know that Jimmy was cut from the team?" Mr. O'Brien bluntly replies, "yes, I did! But, I didn't think it was fair." Mr. Frazier, in an interrogating tone of voice, asks Mr. O'Brien, "then, sir, do you know why Jimmy was on the track?" Mr. Frazier is now conducting his own investigation. Apparently, someone is hiding something from Mr. Frazier, and he is going to get to the bottom of it, one way or another. Mr. Frazier will not let his question go unanswered.

Mark looks at Braden, whispering to him, "so, this is what Eddie and Kathy are talking about." Braden whispers back, "yeah. And, there's some really good shit that's going to come down right now." Mark whispers to Braden, "yeah, I can see that. And, it's definitely getting better." Braden replies, "and just look at him. Jimmy O'Cryin is his new name." Mark has never had the pleasure of being present during one of Mr. Crum's witch hunts.

Mr. O'Brien confesses, telling everyone, "I told Jimmy to go back to tryouts, and try again." The room falls uncomfortably silent, as Mr. Frazier angrily stares right through Mr. O'Brien. Mr. Zunde breaks the silence, saying, "when someone is cut from a team, they do not have the option of coming back the next day to try out again. This is your own fault, Mr. O'Brien. The accident that occurred on the track is completely your own fault." Mr. O'Brien, giving Mr. Zunde some backtalk, replies, "I don't really think so." Mr. Zunde tells Mr. O'Brien, "I don't care what you think. What you think doesn't matter. In fact, considering the evidence, I question whether you even have the ability to think at all. Look to your left at your son. That is the result of you overriding the coach's decision. You had absolutely no authority to do that." Mr. Zunde might have well exclaimed "checkmate" after his last remark. But, he doesn't have to. Even Mr. Crum doesn't have a leg to stand on.

Mr. Zunde continues, "and, even if Jimmy made the team, what he did on the track is completely unacceptable. These two guys, more than two hundred pounds apiece, were running at twenty miles per hour. Your

one-hundred pound son, Jimmy, stepped onto the track right in front of them when he wasn't supposed to. That's about four hundred fifty pounds at twenty miles per hour coming straight on at him. What did you expect to happen?" Mr. O'Brien has no answer. Mr. Zunde tells Mr. O'Brien, "perhaps you should ask Miss Amherst, the physics teacher. She'll be glad to explain transfer of momentum to you."

Mr. Zunde then lectures Mr. O'Brien, telling him, "why don't you attend the meet on Thursday and observe for yourself the level of proficiency that is required to make the team. Then, perhaps, you will finally understand why Jimmy is totally unqualified to run track at this school." Mr. O'Brien sarcastically replies, "I might just do that." Whether Mr. O'Brien will attend or not is anyone's guess. Mr. Zunde then tells Mr. O'Brien, "just be sure to stay out of the red zone. Mr. Crum can explain to you all about the red zone." Mr. Zunde has apparently had enough of dealing with this type of nonsense over the last two weeks.

Mr. Crum is at a complete loss for words. Mr. Frazier hijacked his meeting, and Mr. Zunde put an end to it. Mr. Crum announces, "I called this meeting just so Mark and Axel have an update on Jimmy's condition." Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde do not believe that for a nanosecond. Mr. Crum was looking for someone to incriminate but, since he doesn't want to incriminate Mr. O'Brien, he abruptly changes course. He was headed down a dead end street, and he knows it.

Mr. Crum asks, "does anyone else have anything to say?" Braden replies, "just keep his ass off the track and everything will be just fine." Mr. Crum does not even respond to Braden's comment. Responding to Braden would also be a dead end street at this point. Mr. Crum tells everyone that they are dismissed.

Mr. Frazier, Mr. Zunde, Mark, and Braden all walk out together. In the lobby, Mr. Zunde mentions to everyone, "I don't know where Mr. Crum thought he was going with that. He certainly didn't call that meeting to give you guys an update on Jimmy's condition." Mr. Frazier agrees, stating, "the first meet is tomorrow. He was probably trying to keep these guys out of the meet." Mr. Zunde replies, "exactly." Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier have Mr. Crum figured out.

Mark and Braden head back to class, learning first hand what happens in Mr. Crum's office. As they are walking back to class, Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde overhear Braden saying to Mark, "it looks to me like Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde gave the principal a first class ass kicking in there." Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier look at each other and laugh, glad to see that Mark and Braden got some amusement today.

Mark and Braden get back to class and take their seat. Shortly after, Jimmy O'Brien walks into class, and takes his seat. Miss Starr, seeing Jimmy in a neck brace, asks, "Jimmy, were you in an accident?" Jimmy, pointing in the direction of Mark and Braden, replies, "they ran over me on the track." Braden cannot help but comment, "that's because your scrawny little ass shouldn't have been on the track in the first place."

The class starts laughing at O'Brien, who should not have blamed someone else for his own mistake. If he had simply replied "yes," he might have escaped the humiliation that is now waiting for him around the corner. Jimmy O'Brien has now stirred up everyone's interest in what happened on the track. By lunch, the whole school will have heard the story.

The next day, the team is ready for the big event. After the final bell rings, the team heads to the locker room, ready to open the Spring track season. Wendy gets busy driving the Cushman back and forth, delivering the equipment to the track. The last thing to be delivered to the track is the shot-put. Wendy hasn't yet delivered the shot-put, since Bobby B. and Erika are just entering the auxiliary gym for a short team meeting. Wendy will wait until the meeting is over before the shot-put is transported to the track.

Mr. Frazier walks into the gym, and is in a very good mood today. Mr. Frazier tells everyone, "okay, this is it! It's been a rough week, but we are ready. Centerville is ready too. For you freshmen, Centerville is one of our team's rivals. Henderson is the other. Neither of them like us, and that's because we beat them every year. But, this year, we're not only going to beat them. We have the potential to shut them out! So, don't let your guard down. Just get out there, and run your best!" Mr. Frazier goes over some last minute details, and tells the team to head out to the track.

Most of the team members walk out to the track together. From a distance, they see that the stands are full, which is good news for the team. When the fans are on your side, you are destined to perform better. On the opposite end of the spectrum, the Centerville team gets a little worried seeing so many Northside fans in the stands.

Bobby B. and Erika procure the shot-put and get in the Cushman. More specifically, Bobby B. gets in the Cushman and Erika gets on his lap. Wendy drives them to the track, along with the shot-put in the rear bed. The shot-put still gets its special treatment, but no one cares. As long as Bobby B. is number one in the State, Mr. Frazier does not care how the shot-put gets transported to the track.

The Centerville team is already on the track doing some last minute warmup activities. Mark sees McCutchen and McCutchen, Jr. McCutchen's

younger brother, Jeff, is a distance guy. According to Mark, he's about as gullible as McCutchen, and not very good. But, he's only a freshman. John McNamara, the Centerville miler, is spotted by Mitchell. McCutchen and McNamara are Centerville's biggest threat today. The question of the day is whether Amber Amy or Jeff Davis can beat McNamara. The other question is which relay team McCutchen is assigned to.

Mr. Zunde walks over from the field event area, and tells Mr. Frazier, "Mr. O'Brien and Mr. Crum are both in the bleachers. Jimmy is sitting with them." Mr. Frazier replies, "I wonder what their sudden interest in track is all about." Mr. Zunde tells Mr. Frazier, "spread the word to the team. Everyone will perform better if they know they are being watched by those two clowns." The call is made for the hurdles, signifying the beginning of the meet. Mr. Zunde then heads back to the field area.

The hurdlers are set and ready to run, but Eddie, Kathy, and Hoffer pay no attention. The gun goes off, and the sound of spikes grinding into gravel announces the beginning of the track meet and the opening of the Spring track season. The hurdlers are gone. Now it's down to the race against the two fastest runners in the State. Mark reminds Eddie to tell McCutchen that Mark's family will be moving to the Centerville district next year. Mark will support the story later.

The call is made for the 100-yard dash, and Eddie, Kathy, and Hoffer walk to the starting line. McCutchen also walks to the starting line, joined by a few of his buddies from his 4 by 440 relay team. Kathy waves to the crowd, and receives cheers in return. It doesn't take long for the cheering to morph into the Amazon cheer. Mr. Ruff is certainly not happy to hear the word "Amazon" again.

At the blocks, Eddie tells McCutchen, "we're losing Mark next year. His parents are moving to your district." McCutchen, who is startled by the news, asks, "really? Are you serious?" Eddie replies, "yeah. Next year, he'll be standing there, right next to you, and I'll be running against him." McCutchen does not like Mark in the least. Mark and McCutchen have been rivals ever since they both began running track. McCutchen is clearly not happy about Eddie's news.

The Starter is amused at the pre-race discussion. He sees this every year, and looks forward to hearing what new and interesting stories Northside comes up with. The Starter announces, "on your marks," catching McCutchen a little off guard. The Starter announces, "set." The gun goes off, and the runners are all out of the blocks. Kathy lets out a loud primal scream, startling McCutchen and his teammates. At 50 yards, Eddie and Kathy have a decent lead, with Hoffer in third place. McCutchen, in fourth place, has diminishing hopes of catching Hoffer. As they approach the finish line, Eddie crosses first, followed by Kathy.

Hoffer finishes third, with the team sweeping the event. Eddie, Kathy, Hoffer, and Mr. Frazier exchange high-fives, and walk back to the bench.

On the way to the bench, Mr. Frazier tells Eddie and Kathy, “now would be a good time to get your discus throws in. Just make sure you’re fully recovered from the race.” Mr. Frazier tells Kathy, “and, by the way, Mr. Crum is sitting in the bleachers. See if you can throw the discus more than twenty feet and surprise him.” Kathy replies, “oh he is, is he? I’m going to show that little twit what Amazon means.” After all the stress Mr. Crum has dished out to Kathy, she has zero tolerance for him, and will rip him into shreds if need be. Kathy and Eddie sit on the bench for a few minutes before they go and throw the discus. Mr. Frazier informs the team, “so far, it’s a shutout. Good work! Good work!”

Eddie and Kathy head over to the field area, and check in with the Head Field Judge. The Field Judge places them in the rotation, and they wait their turn. Eddie walks over to the shot-put pad, and asks Bobby B., “how are you doing?” Bobby B. replies, “I won.” After one throw, the shot-doc has taken first place in the event. No one is likely to even come close to his throw. Eddie asks, “how about everyone else?” Bobby B. replies, “so far, we’re in the lead. They’re not very good this year. We almost have it wrapped up.” Bobby B. then whispers to Eddie, “I threw the shot-put farther than one of their javelin guys threw the javelin.” Eddie laughs, and replies, “seriously, bro? That’s actually kind of funny.” Eddie walks over toward the discus pad, and is up next. Kathy walks with him, and will be up right after him.

Kathy tells Eddie, “now is your big moment. You’ve been waiting for this.” Eddie takes the discus and gets on the pad. Eddie tells the Head Field Judge at the pad, “you might want to tell the Field Judges out there to move back.” The Head Field Judge motions to the other Field Judges to move back.

Eddie goes into the wind up, into the spin, and releases the discus. The discus soars over the heads of the Field Judges. They find the mark and make the measurement. The officials record 193 feet, 7 inches. The Head Field Judge tells the other Field Judges to take another measurement. The Head Field Judge goes out to verify the throw himself, and finds the original measurement is correct.

The Centerville discus men look at Eddie as if he is from a different planet. Eddie just threw the discus farther than the winning throw at State last year. Now, it’s Kathy’s turn. Eddie tells Kathy, “all those people on the bleachers are on your side, well, except for Crum and O’Brien.” The six-foot tall, 175-pound discus girl takes the discus and walks toward the discus pad. Seeing Kathy getting ready to throw, the crowd stands, and goes wild.

Kathy waves to the crowd and smiles as she walks onto the discus pad. The Amazon cheer begins, and Kathy goes into the wind up. Kathy goes into the spin and, as she releases the discus, lets out a primal scream that is so loud that it can be heard over all the cheering. The crowd suddenly goes silent when they see where Kathy's throw lands. The crowd claps, being amazed at what they just witnessed.

Eddie gives Kathy a hug, as they wait for the measurement. Kathy is just happy to throw the discus. To her it's fun, and that's what it's all about. Eddie tells Kathy, "Springer said that Mr. Crum was watching you." Kathy replies, "why? Girls can only throw the discus twenty feet."

The measurement comes in at 155 feet, 9 inches, just slightly over the twenty feet Mr. Crum expected. That would make Kathy's throw the second best of the afternoon. Springer is currently in third place, with a throw of 151 feet, 3 inches. With Kathy surpassing his throw, Springer will have to step up his game.

After a few more events, the call is made for the one-mile run. On the way to the starting line, Barbara tells the runners, "remember, we're running for time today, not strategy. Everyone needs to get a good run under their belt today and qualify for State." She explains that, if they get a good run, and qualify for the State invitational meet, they will have more flexibility to win by strategy later in the season.

Akinmola asks, "why doesn't everyone just always run their fastest?" Mitchell responds, "because sometimes it's hot outside." Akinmola asks, "why does that matter?" Mitchell answers, "in some meets, it's nice to run only as fast as you need to win." Akinmola asks, "why is that?" Barbara explains, "if you're always running your fastest in competition, you run a greater risk of injury. And, not to mention, you have more than one event to run in each meet. You don't need to burn yourself out in one event if you can help it." Akinmola asks lots of questions. But, after all, Akinmola is new to the country, and wants to conform. At the starting line, Mr. Frazier also reminds them, "I want your best time today. I don't want anyone slacking off."

Mr. Ruff is also at the starting line with his team. Mr. Ruff looks over the Northside runners, trying to estimate their speed by their physical appearance. He notices that Akinmola and Amber are new to the team. Amber ran on the indoor team, but Mr. Ruff did not take notice. Mr. Ruff clearly remembers that Mr. Frazier made mention of a trip to Africa to pick up a distance runner. Seeing Akinmola, it's now time for Mr. Ruff to investigate.

Mr. Ruff comments to Mr. Frazier, "I see you have some new talent this Spring." Mr. Frazier boasts, "yeah! The girl is from the Amazon. She's

Paula's sister. And, the tall guy is Akinmola. He's from Nigeria. I told you about him during the State meet. We picked him up two weeks ago." Mr. Ruff replies, "oh, really? Are they fast?" Mr. Frazier replies, "we'll see in a moment. This is their first Spring season. I hope I got what I paid for." Mr. Ruff sincerely believes that Mr. Frazier is up to something, but he does not know exactly what.

After the runners are positioned, the Starter announces, "set." The runners get set, and the gun is fired. During the first 100 yards, everyone contends for a position where they feel comfortable. At 100 yards, Mitchell is in the lead, with Akinmola right behind him. Amber and Davis are right behind Akinmola.

Mr. Frazier tells Barbara, "this is going to be interesting. This is Akinmola's first race in competition." Barbara informs Mr. Frazier, "he's got more under the hood than he's showing." Mr. Frazier asks, "oh yeah? What have you seen?" Barbara tells Mr. Frazier, "he's tried the high jump a few times, just for fun. He's every bit as good as Decker. We need to look at that a little more later." Mr. Frazier replies, "Decker is our number one guy in the high jump. He rarely, if ever, loses."

After the first lap, Mitchell and Akinmola are still leading. Mitchell would prefer to be in second place, and Akinmola in first place. Mitchell and Akinmola are pushing each other to their limit. Neither Mitchell nor Akinmola wants to lose this race. Amber is in third place, and Davis in fourth place. There are Centerville runners in the race, but they are too far behind to matter. McCutchen, Jr. is among them.

Halfway through the race, Mr. Ruff is getting quite angry. Mr. Ruff understands and accepts that Mitchell took the gold medal in the mile over the Winter. What is angering Mr. Ruff is that Akinmola is right behind Mitchell. Mitchell's and Akinmola's half mile split times were on par with Mitchell's gold medal performance. And, if that is not enough, Amber is in third place, not far behind the leaders.

Mr. Ruff walks over to Mr. Frazier and asks, "where is your new guy from again?" Mr. Frazier replies, "I told you. Nigeria." Stating the obvious, Mr. Frazier mentions, "he's looking really good for a sophomore." Learning that Akinmola is a sophomore is not exactly what Mr. Ruff wanted to hear. That means there will be two more years of contending with Akinmola after this season.

During the last lap of the race, Mitchell and Akinmola battle it out for first place. Amber is battling it out with Davis for third place. All eyes are on Mitchell and Akinmola as they rapidly approach the finish line. Mitchell sprints to the end, and wins the race. Akinmola finishes in

second place, not far behind the State's best miler. Amber beats out Davis for third place by a few yards.

Barbara and Mr. Frazier congratulate the distance stars on a great run. Mr. Frazier assures Mitchell and Akinmola that their times have qualified them both for the State invitational meet. Mr. Frazier, Barbara, and their distance team celebrate as they head back to the bench, while the Centerville team finally crosses the finish line. Sweeping another event, Northside is still on track to shut out Centerville, and Centerville's coach, Mr. Ruff, knows it.

Soon after the mile, the call is made for the 440-yard dash. Braden, Erika, and Johnson will be running this race today. Mr. Frazier assigned Johnson to the 440-yard dash for this meet. On the way to the starting line, Mr. Frazier, not wanting to be left out of the psychological warfare, tells Braden, "remember, they've approved your bonus if you break 50 seconds." Mr. Frazier said this for the benefit of McCutchen, who just passed by. Anything heard by McCutchen quickly makes its way back to his coach.

At the starting line, Braden is exclaiming, "we're kicking ass! We're taking it all today! Ain't no one stopping us!" Braden jogs up to the starting line ready to go. Braden repeatedly points to his chest, and exclaims, "I'm the chief ass-kicker around here! Ain't no one gonna beat me! Let's get this ass kicking started and over with so we can move on to the next one!" One of the Centerville runners mentions to another, "can't he just shut up?" Another Centerville runner explains, "he does this every meet, and he always wins." As if Braden's pre-race rants are not enough, the crowd, seeing Erika at the starting line, begins the Amazon chant. Erika waves to the crowd, and the cheering gets louder.

Once the runners are ready, the Starter tells the runners, "on your marks." Braden exclaims, "here we go! The ass kicking of the century is about to begin!" The Starter announces, "set." The gun goes off, and the runners are out of the blocks. In no time, Braden is in first place. Johnson and Erika are in second and third place respectively. Erika is not about to take fourth place. Fourth place counts for nothing, and she wants to make a difference.

Halfway through the race, Braden is in the lead, Johnson is in second place, and Erika still in third place. Unfortunately, halfway through the race, most of the Centerville runners are too far behind to catch up. Their best runner in the race is closely following Erika, but is having difficulty catching her.

As they approach the finish line, Braden is easily on track to break 50 seconds. At the finish line, Braden crosses first, followed by Johnson.

Erika, in third place, battles it out with the Centerville runner, who is in fourth place. Erika manages to hold on, and takes third place. All three Northside runners delivered respectable times, and Mr. Frazier congratulates them on a fine run.

With the field events over, and the 4 by 440 relay approaching, Mr. Frazier asks Mr. Zunde and Decker to take Akinmola over to the high jump to see what he can do. They head over, hoping that Akinmola can add to the talent in that area. Akinmola is happy to give it a try, and tells them that he has high jumped a few times before.

Decker shows Akinmola the technique for the high jump. They start out with the bar at a medium height. Akinmola gives it a try, and successfully makes the jump. They raise the bar, and Decker jumps again. Akinmola takes a turn, and successfully makes the jump. The process of raising the bar and jumping continues, as the spectators watch the unofficial high jump competition. The bar is finally raised to Decker's winning jump, which Akinmola is easily able to do. Mr. Zunde is satisfied for now, and will explore Akinmola's abilities in the high jump during the next practice.

The call is made for the final event of the day. Eddie, Kathy, Mark and Paula head over to the starting line to run the 4 by 440 relay. Seeing Kathy and Paula being part of the final event, the crowd begins the Amazon chant. No one dares to leave the meet early. So far, the meet has been a shutout, and the final event is expected to seal the unprecedented victory. Mr. Ruff, the Centerville coach, already knows he's going to lose this race. He has already lost the meet. His anger is being displayed from every orifice and appendage of his body.

At the starting line, McCutchen mentions to Mark, "hey, I heard you're moving to my district." Mark replies, "who told you that?" Pointing to Eddie, McCutchen replies, "he did." Mark whispers to McCutchen, "my parent's weren't really moving. That's just what everyone thinks. Your school superintendent over there in Centerville was going to pay me more to run for your team, but Northside matched the offer. And, I'll get a big bonus if I can consistently break 50 in the 440. They gave Braden the same deal, and look what he's doing this year." McCutchen replies, "you can't be serious." Mark frankly tells McCutchen, "how much do you think Eddie gets paid for throwing the discus almost 200 feet? And, look at Bobby B., our shot-put guy. Does he even look like he's in high school? Throwing the shot-put is how he makes his college tuition money. You need to wake up."

Having McCutchen's full attention, Mark adds, "hey, it's not only us. The football players get a one-hundred dollar bonus to take someone out for the rest of the game. And, they get two-hundred dollars to take out

the quarterback.” McCutchen tells Mark, “you can’t be real.” Mark replies, “well, you do have a point. Those figures are for the first half of the game. During the second half, they’ll only get half as much.” McCutchen asks, “what about baseball?” Mark replies, “they get nothing. No one cares about baseball around here. And, just look. Our baseball team kind of sucks.”

To McCutchen, Mark sounds very convincing. McCutchen has heard the rumor about Bobby B. and the tuition money before. Hearing it twice must, therefore, make it true. McCutchen thinks about all of what Mark said for a moment, and comes to the conclusion that Mark does have a point. McCutchen is now ticked off that he runs for free and that the deck is stacked against him. And, the icing on the cake is that McCutchen heard Mr. Frazier telling Braden, right before the 440-yard dash, “remember, they’ve approved your bonus if you break 50 seconds.”

The Starter was delaying the start of the race because he was amused with listening to Mark messing with McCutchen’s mind. He finally tells the runners to get ready. The Starter tells the runners “on your marks.” The Starter announces, “set.” The gun goes off, and the runners are out of the blocks. Mark is out of the blocks first, and takes an early lead. Mark’s run clearly gives everyone the impression that he is running for more than just the win. Mark approaches the transition zone, and is in first place by a significant margin.

Mark hands off the baton to Paula, who takes off running like she is running for gold in the State invitational meet. Paula maintains the lead well into her leg. Kathy watches as Paula makes her way around the track. Kathy is remembering when she watched Paula hand off to Erika over the indoor season, when she didn’t even have enough energy to stand and cheer. But, that is all behind Kathy now, and she steps onto the track and waits as Paula comes around the curve.

Paula approaches the transition zone, and hands off to Kathy. Kathy lets out her primal scream when she takes off, catching everyone’s attention. The Amazon chant shifts into high gear as the discus girl makes her way around the track. Even Mr. Frazier, for the first time, joins in with the Amazon chant. Kathy widens the lead, leaving Eddie little work to do during his leg. Eddie and McCutchen enter the track, waiting for their batons. McCutchen, however, will have to wait 40 seconds longer than Eddie to receive his baton.

While they are in the transition zone, Eddie tells McCutchen, “hey, your team is headed to the bus. You’d better run and catch up with them. They might leave without you.” McCutchen doesn’t even reply to Eddie’s remark. Mark, who overheard Eddie’s comment to McCutchen along with Paula, tells her, “wow! That was a really good one!”

Kathy hands off to Eddie, who intends to break 50 seconds during his leg. Kathy drops to the ground to catch her breath, as she turns her head watching as Eddie runs his leg. When Eddie is more than halfway around the track, McCutchen finally receives his baton. Even though Centerville has no chance of winning, Eddie does not relent. He is not running only to win. The relay team has already done that. Eddie, like everyone else on the 4 by 440 relay team, is running for a ticket to the State invitational meet. Eddie approaches the finish line, where Kathy, and the relay team's ticket to the State invitational meet, are waiting for him.

Mr. Frazier gives every team member he sees a high-five. The 4 by 440 relay team has won the event, and their time will get them an invitation to the State invitational meet. And, the icing on the cake is that Northside has shut out Centerville. The team jogs back to the bench to join in with the victory celebration that is going on there. Kathy and Paula wave to the crowd as they pass by. Many of the spectators come down from the bleachers to join in with the team's celebration.

While McCutchen is still on the track finishing his lap, Mr. Ruff is having a discussion with one of the Timekeepers. Mr. Frazier sees the conversation, and suspects it is about the new rumors that have been started today. The Timekeeper listens to Mr. Ruff's complaint, pretending to act serious. The Timekeeper, however, knows that the rumors are false, and are nothing more than a creative mode of distraction. The Timekeeper is amused that Mr. Ruff is actually taking the rumors so seriously. Mr. Ruff, who has been hammered by Northside for the last two years, is understandably distressed.

A few of the parents who were watching the meet bring their younger daughters down to the team's bench so they can meet the discus girl. The younger girls are so happy to meet Kathy. They are quite surprised to see that she is six feet tall, and actually has big muscles. Kathy gives the girls lots of attention.

The girls want to see the discus, so Kathy takes them over to the field area so they can get a look. Kathy lets each of them hold the discus. One of the girls mentions, "wow! That's really heavy." It's anybody's guess whether Kathy is talking to a future discus thrower or track star. With all the victories Kathy experienced today, talking with the younger girls is the high point of her afternoon.

One of the girls asks Kathy, "can you throw the discus again so we can watch?" Kathy tells her, "I can. But, we'll first have to ask the Field Judge if it's okay." Kathy and the girls walk over to a Field Judge, and she asks if she can throw the discus for the girls. The Field Judge tells them, "sure. It looks like the field is clear. If it looks like someone is going to step out into the red zone, I'll stop you."

They head over to the discus pad, and the girls, along with their parents, stand off to the side along with the Field Judge. The Field Judge gives Kathy the go ahead, so she steps onto the discus pad, with the discus in hand. Kathy goes into the wind up, and into the spin, releasing the discus along with her primal scream.

The girls all exclaim, “wow,” as they get to see the discus girl throw the discus from up close. One of the girls exclaims, “wow! That is so awesome!” Watching up close is a whole lot different from watching from the bleachers. The kids are in awe seeing Kathy throw the discus 150 feet. Kathy, as it seems, now has a new fan club. But, the younger girls have to go home with their parents, and Kathy has to join up with the team. Before they leave, the girls tell Kathy that they will be watching for her during the next meet.

Kathy walks out to the field to retrieve her discus. As the bleachers empty out, Kathy notices Mr. Crum being helped by Mr. O’Brien as he attempts to navigate the bleachers on his broken leg. There’s no doubt that Mr. Crum saw Kathy’s discus throw while she was talking with the younger girls today. There’s also no doubt that Mr. Crum saw Kathy’s second place throw during the meet. Thus far, Kathy has not been suspect in Mr. Crum’s investigation into who threw the discus at him. Mr. Crum undoubtedly just revised his list.

As Kathy retrieves her discus, the team heads to the lockers. On the way, Paula decides the tribe is going out to get pizza for a big celebration. No one objects but, after catching up with the tribe, Kathy learns of the plans. Kathy asks, “hey, how come you guys made plans without me?” Paula remarks, “like you’re going to object?” Kathy smiles, and replies, “well, I heard Mr. Crum is getting pizza after the meet.” Paula, shocked at what she just heard, replies, “no! That can’t be! You can’t be serious.” Kathy laughs, and exclaims, “had you going!” Paula starts chasing Kathy, who quickly tosses the discus to Eddie. The team, including Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde, stops to watch, as everyone wonders what Paula is going to do when she finally catches Kathy.

The chase goes on long enough for Mitchell to run a mile. It appears that Kathy lets Paula catch her, probably because she wants her pizza. Paula tags Kathy, and they both walk back to the group. Mark asks, “what was that all about?” Kathy tells Mark, “I let her win.” Paula responds, “no, you didn’t.” Kathy replies, “oh yes, I did.” Paula replies, “in your dreams.” The exchange goes on between Kathy and Paula for a minute or so, with neither yielding to the other.

Paula then tells Mark, who is waiting for his answer, “when we were kids, we used to play tag together. We would chase each other down forever.” Kathy adds, “everyone else was too slow, so me and Paula played

our own game of tag when everyone else was playing theirs. The other kids were way too easy to catch.” Mr. Frazier, hearing Kathy and Paula’s explanation of what just happened, gains a little more insight into why the two girls are so fast.

After they get dressed, they all head out to the pizzeria. They invite Akinmola to go with them, who mentions he had a pizza once. Since he is new to the school, he is glad to go out to eat with the team, and make some new friends. Shortly after they leave, Mark asks, “how come you girls are walking?” Kathy answers, telling Mark, “I think I’m walking this year, only because I can. I even walked to school today.” Eddie, Mark, and Paula understand Kathy’s comment, which makes no sense to anyone else.

Akinmola asks, “how would they get there if they didn’t walk?” Mark explains to Akinmola, “sometimes we carry them. It’s a good workout.” Bobby B. puts Erika on his shoulders, and tells Akinmola, “like this, for a whole mile.” Akinmola exclaims, “no wonder you guys are so strong and fast!” Carrying the girls is only a drop in the bucket compared to the rest of their workouts, but Akinmola is beginning to get the picture. Akinmola is now 100 percent sure that his father found the best track team around for him.

They arrive at the pizzeria and take their usual seat. Since they are a large group, Joe comes over and takes their order. Most everyone gets pizza. Bobby B., the lone hold out, orders his usual, telling Joe, “I’ll have spaghetti with extra sauce, and three breasts.” Erika, who has no shortage of come backs for Bobby B’s. standard order, mentions, “that’s one and a half women. Tell me, who is the other half? I’ve got to know!” Kathy reassures Erika, “when he orders four breasts, that’s when you begin to worry.” Everyone, including Joe, laughs at Erika’s comment.

During dinner, a familiar face just happens to show up and gets in line to place an order. Eddie tells Kathy, “I think your old friend Mahoney is back, but I’m not sure.” Kathy replies, “oh really? He is?” Eddie is not 100 percent convinced that it is Mahoney who walked in. The guy who walked in is five feet, nine inches, and weighs about 130 lbs. If it is Mahoney, he is extremely emaciated.

Kathy turns around and sees that it actually is Mahoney in line. Paula remarks, “yeah, that’s him. He’s about the build he was in ninth grade before he started working out. Don’t worry about him, though.” Kathy mentions, “I guess they let him out of the sanitarium.” Kathy then asks, “do sanitariums have a Spring break?” Braden tells Kathy, “it looks like you don’t need us to take care of him anymore.” Kathy, who now towers over Mahoney, and is obviously much stronger than he is, no longer fears him in the least.

After placing his order, Mahoney sees Eddie and the tribe all sitting together. Mahoney walks over, and the tribe's adrenaline levels at the table go up to pre-race levels. Mahoney says to Kathy, "hey, I just wanted to say that I'm sorry for pushing you over that day." Everyone is in shock hearing what Mahoney has to say to Kathy. Kathy stands up, turns toward Mahoney, telling him, "don't worry about it. I forgive you." Mahoney is quite fearful, seeing Kathy's appearance now compared with when she was a sophomore.

The group, seeing Kathy standing next to Mahoney, is quite confident that Mahoney won't be giving her any problems in the future. Mahoney says to everyone, "it's nice to see you all again," and walks away. Everyone wonders what happened to Mahoney. It is the first time anyone has ever seen him this personable. Mahoney goes to pick up his order, and leaves. Perhaps a year in the sanatorium did Mahoney some good.

After dinner, everyone steps outside and talks for quite a while longer. The group explains to Erika, Amber, and Akinmola the story behind Mahoney, and what a problem he was a few years ago. Everyone then walks home, going in different directions. Kathy walks down the street confidently, not only because Eddie is with her, but because she now knows Mahoney poses less of a threat to her than a dead frog.

The following day, in school, the word gets around that the track team had shut out Centerville High School, their opponent. The football team is happy to hear this too. Earlier this year, the football team creamed Centerville, with the final score being 56-3. Centerville is the school's rival in every sport, especially football. The word also gets around that Kathy took second place in the discus. This prompts the school newspaper to feature an article about Kathy.

Also, on Friday, some other news and wisdom are distributed around the school. Mr. O'Brien, who was at yesterday's meet with Mr. Crum, has finally figured out why his son, Jimmy, is not qualified to run track. Chuckie has been bailed out of jail, and is back in school. He is now the laughing stock of the class. And, Mr. Crum, hobbling around on crutches, might have an inkling that he is not quite the big shot he purports to be.

After school, at track practice, the photographer for the school newspaper, Lynn Berson, gets a few pictures of Kathy for the featured article. Lynn is also one of the photographers for the yearbook. She wants to get pictures of Kathy throwing the discus for the yearbook during the next meet. It doesn't stop there. Lynn gets quite a few photographs of the team running drills and the field athletes hurling their implements through the air. The best photograph of all, however, is Erika sitting on Bobby B's lap in the Cushman. That photograph is bound to make it into the yearbook.

Kathy's new fan club, comprising quite a few elementary and middle school girls, is getting larger. They are at every meet to watch the discus girl do her thing. The fan club's presence at every meet forces Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde to permanently assign Kathy to the discus. After every meet, they all meet Kathy at the discus pad, where she throws the discus once or twice so they can watch from up close. This has become Kathy's favorite part of each track meet. This gives Kathy a lot of reassurance that she someday wants to be a gym teacher.

The team practices hard over the next few weeks. Winning every meet this season, the team is stronger than it's ever been. The turnout for every meet packs the bleachers. Mr. Crum and Mr. O'Brien have yet to attend a meet since the first meet of the season, but they are not missed at all.

Mr. Crum is not exactly everyone's favorite principal, which has been clearly evident over this school year. In fact, no one in the school, student or teacher, likes the seemingly mentally ill administrator, except for a few select teachers, Mr. O'Brien included. For Mr. Zunde, however, any dealings with Mr. Crum are fun and games. Learning from Mr. Zunde, the tribe has also learned to treat any encounters with Mr. Crum as fun and games, at least to the extent that they can get away with it. Over the last year, Kathy and Paula in particular have learned not to put up with any of Mr. Crum's bullshit.

On the way to lunch, Eddie, Mark, and Braden walk from their lockers to the lunchroom. Waiting in the school lobby for the rest of the tribe to arrive, Eddie, wondering who is participating in the four-way meet after school today, asks Mark and Braden, "who are we up against today?" Braden replies, "it don't matter none. We're kicking all three of their asses!" Mark tells Eddie, "you should know better than to ask Braden that question." Eddie replies, "I was just wondering because Kathy mentioned something about college scouts attending today's meet." Mark concludes, "we must be up against someone good." Braden informs Mark, "none of them are any good! They always get their ass kicked, and we're the ones always doing the ass kicking!" Mark concedes, telling Braden, "you do have a point." Braden's confidence cannot be overstated.

Kathy walks up with Paula, and the group is almost together. Kathy asks, "where's Bobby B.?" Mark replies, "he's probably standing in front of his locker doing curls with his books before lunch." With a slick comeback, Eddie asks, "Bobby B. has books?" Mark replies, "yeah. He has one book. The title is 'Taking Proper Care of the Shot-Put.'" Kathy laughs, telling the group, "hey now! That wouldn't be a book. That would be only one sheet of paper!" Mark suggests, "we'll make it into a book. That will keep him really busy."

Just then, Mr. Crum walks out of his office, seeing most of the tribe congregated in the school lobby. Erroneously thinking that trouble is brewing, Mr. Crum, still using crutches, hobbles briskly toward the group. Mr. Crum is suddenly intercepted by a guy named Wendell Wadler who goes by the name Snake, as evidenced by the name "Snake" embroidered on the back of his denim jacket. Snake greets Mr. Crum with a sucker punch to his less than developed abdominal area. Snake yells out, "that's for calling my parents when I was cutting class!" Mr. Crum falls to the floor and, with his broken leg, is somewhat immobile. Snake continues to rough up Mr. Crum, who yells out, "help me! Someone, help me here!"

Standing fifteen feet away, Eddie exclaims, "wow! Mr. Crum is fighting in school!" Braden laughs, and exclaims, "somebody, get a teacher!" Kathy replies, "that's a good idea! I think I'll do that!" Kathy runs over to the lunchroom, and informs the teacher who has lunchroom duty this week that a fight has broken out. Kathy returns with Mr. Harrison, the permanent substitute, finding Mr. Crum sitting on the ground held in a headlock by Snake as he annoyingly grinds his knuckles back and forth across Mr. Crum's balding head.

As Eddie and the tribe watch, Mr. Harrison, yells out, "hey! You two! Break it up! Break it up!" Getting a closer look and realizing that Mr. Crum is involved, Mr. Harrison exclaims, "hey! Someone, break this up!" Braden politely informs Mr. Harrison, "we got a meet this afternoon. If I break this up, he might suspend my ass. I don't want to get suspended before this meet!" Echoing the sentiment, Mark, loud enough for Mr. Crum to hear, says, "yeah! We don't want to get suspended for fighting in school." Joining in, Eddie tells Mr. Harrison, "we did what he always tells us to do, which is to get a teacher."

As a crowd gathers to watch the principal receive his ass kicking, Mr. Harrison rushes over to the administrative area, instructing Mrs. Marlowe to get Mr. Zunde to the school lobby as fast as possible. The announcement is made, "Mr. Zunde, please report to the school lobby immediately. Mr. Zunde, please report to the school lobby immediately." In the physical education office, Mr. Zunde tells Mr. Frazier and Mr. Chubin, "Mrs. Marlowe repeated herself. This sounds like a fight. I'll be right back." Mr. Zunde stands up and, accompanied by Mr. Frazier and Mr. Chubin, heads to the school lobby.

Arriving at the scene and seeing the entire tribe standing together, Mr. Frazier comments, "uh oh. This doesn't look too good." Breaking through the crowd that has developed, Mr. Zunde sees Mr. Crum being held by Wadler in a headlock. Mr. Zunde tells Wadler and Mr. Crum, "both of you! Break it up! Now!" Looking up and seeing Mr. Zunde standing over him, Wadler releases Mr. Crum and makes a run for it.

Escaping down the hall, Wadler is fortunate enough to not be chased down by anyone. If Wadler were attacking someone from the tribe, he would have been chased down by at least a half-dozen people. Attempting to stand up, Mr. Crum stumbles a few times, and finally manages to get vertical. Now that the situation is under control, Mr. Chubin heads back to the gym while Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier sort things out.

As Mr. Crum explains to Mr. Zunde what happened, Mr. Frazier is discussing the situation with the tribe. Mr. Frazier asks, "how did all this start?" Full of energy, Braden explains, "we were hanging around, waiting for Bobby B. to show up. That guy, whoever he is, came up and gave Mr. Crum a sucker punch. Then, he put Mr. Crum's ass in a headlock and was giving him a bad-ass noogie. I'm glad I wasn't on the other end of that noogie! None of us wanted to get in the middle of that shit! We got a big meet today, and we didn't want to get suspended."

Mark adds, "Kathy went to get Mr. Harrison. We did what Mr. Crum always told us to do, which is to get a teacher. Apparently, that didn't go over too well." Mr. Frazier asks, "who was the student that was in the fight?" Eddie replies, "Wendell Wadler. He goes by the name Snake. He's pretty much an asshole." Quite relieved, Mr. Frazier tells the group, "good. You guys did exactly what you were supposed to do. I can't see how this is going to be an issue."

Mr. Frazier perhaps spoke a bit too soon. Mr. Crum exclaims, "everyone! In my office now!" Kathy, who has had enough of Mr. Crum's shit this year, sarcastically replies, "everyone? Does that mean you want all the teachers and students in the school to report to your office?" Mr. Crum exclaims, "no! Of course not!"

Kathy motions to the rest of the tribe with her head to follow her as she walks to the lunchroom. The tribe follows, prompting Mr. Crum to exclaim, "all of you! Get back here immediately!" Kathy turns around and, admonishing Mr. Crum, explains, "Mr. Crum, this is a school! You're expected to use proper and understandable English. I'm sure you'd agree that if you had better qualified whom you are addressing, you might have obtained the cooperation that you were apparently seeking. But, as it stands, by your own admission, your use of the word 'everyone' is vague and misleading." In response to Kathy's lecture, Mr. Crum verbalizes specifically whom he wants to report to his office, which includes the entire tribe. Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier join the meeting, knowing that it is going to be an interesting one.

As the tribe stands comfortably close together in Mr. Crum's office, the words "Wendell Wadler, please report to the administrative office immediately" are heard over the public address system. Eddie comments,

"I wonder why they're calling that jerk to the office. By now, he's probably a mile away from here." Mitchell replies, "exactly. He's likely starting his second fight of the day." Eddie tells Mitchell, "either that, or he's headed to the knife shop."

Mr. Crum listens to the commentary, but has nothing to say at the moment. A minute later, Eddie suggests to Mr. Crum, "you might as well start your meeting. Wadler's not going to show up." Mr. Crum exclaims, "I'm running this meeting, not you!" Using a highly sarcastic tone, Kathy tells Mr. Crum, "waiting." Mr. Crum knows not to respond to Kathy's sarcastic innuendo, for it will get him nowhere but in a deeper hole.

Since Mr. Crum ignored Kathy's sarcasm, adding a bit more fuel to the fire, Kathy tells Mr. Crum, "you can start your shit show now." Mr. Crum tells Kathy, "I've had enough out of you, Miss Karakova!" Kathy replies, "do I sound like I care?" Kathy then asks Eddie, "hey. You wouldn't have your discus on you, would you?" Mr. Zunde laughs, whispering to Mr. Frazier, "this is going to get interesting." Mr. Crum ignores Kathy's remark, knowing that responding will get him absolutely nowhere.

Realizing that Wadler is not showing up, Mr. Crum opens the meeting by stating, "I want to know what happened out there just a few minutes ago." Quick with an answer, Braden responds, "it looks to me like you got your ass kicked." Snickering is heard from the tribe, prompting Mr. Crum to exclaim, "I'm not in the mood for this today!" Paula asks, "does that mean we can go to lunch now?" Mr. Crum, who falls into the same trap every time, exclaims, "no! I'm just getting started!"

Resorting to asking pointed and specific questions, Mr. Crum asks, "I want to know which one of you people were involved in this!" Eddie replies, "none of us. We were just standing around, waiting for Bobby B. and Erika." In a heated tone, Mr. Crum asks Eddie, "do you expect me to believe that?" Eddie calmly replies, "yes. As a matter of fact, I do." Mr. Crum bluntly tells Eddie, "for the record, I don't believe you!" Eddie sarcastically replies, "fine, then. Have it your way. We were all involved because we didn't stop the fight. So was Mr. Harrison, because he didn't break up the fight either. And, so were the other fifty people who were standing around watching you get your ass kicked. So, why are you singling us out?" Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier stand with their arms crossed, both wondering where Mr. Crum is going with his inquisition.

Hearing but not understanding what Eddie just explained, Mr. Crum informs Eddie, exclaiming, "I know you people were involved somehow! None of you broke up the fight!" Approaching the problem from another angle, Braden responds, exclaiming, "what are we gonna break up the fight for? All you ever tell us to do is to go and find a teacher! So, that's exactly what we did! Kathy went and found a teacher. A lot of good that

did you. You got your ass kicked, and you got your head noogied! And, the teacher didn't do shit to break up the fight! It sounds to me like your school policies in that book on the shelf ain't worth a shit." Mr. Crum yells out, "one of you could have broken it up!" Mark informs Mr. Crum, "we have a big track meet this afternoon. We didn't want to get suspended."

Pressing the question, Mr. Crum smugly informs the group, "some of you must have been in on this! I'm going to get to the bottom of this." Kathy replies, "waiting." Eddie then informs Mr. Crum, "you're crazy. If any of us were involved with Wadler, we'd be kicking his ass. And, we certainly wouldn't be kicking his ass on school grounds. And, by the way, if this did happen off school grounds, Wadler would be laying on the ground, wondering when the ambulance was going to show up." Still on a rampage, Mr. Crum bluntly tells Eddie, "some of you must have been involved, and I want to know who it was!" Eddie replies, "why don't you ask Wadler? He's the one that kicked your ass." Mr. Crum, acting irrational, replies, "because he's not here!"

Purely to annoy Mr. Crum, Eddie instructs the principal, asking, "why don't you have Mrs. Marlowe call Wadler to the office?" Mr. Crum exclaims, "she already did!" Taking control of Mr. Crum's meeting, Eddie suggests, "Wadler could have left school grounds. Maybe you should give him detention. Wait a second. Wadler kicked your ass. That's probably worth a one-day suspension. No. On second thought, it's his first offense. Just let it slide." Mr. Crum exclaims, "I'm running this meeting, not you!"

As the heated argument continues, Mr. Zunde whispers to Mr. Frazier, "I'd stop this now, but I want to see where Crum takes this." Mr. Frazier replies, "he doesn't have a leg to stand on. It sounds like he's gone deep sea fishing in a rain puddle." Mr. Zunde laughs, and informs Mr. Frazier, "we'll stop this when he uses the 'S' word." The 'S' word is "suspension", which is usually where Mr. Zunde draws the line. But, in the meantime, Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier stand back with their arms crossed and watch the free entertainment.

Kathy points out to Mr. Crum, "in case you totally missed it, Wadler said to you, 'that's for calling my parents when I was cutting class!' That sounds to me like he has an issue with you. So, why are you bothering us?" Mr. Crum hammers his fist on the desk, yelling out, "that's it! Unless I get some answers, everyone in this room will be given detention!" Braden quickly tells Mr. Crum, "that was pretty lame ass, how you hammered your fist on your desk like that. Your desk didn't even break. Eddie's father did a whole lot better than that." Mr. Crum exclaims, "that's it! Every one of you are going to detention!"

Kathy boldly tells Mr. Crum, "I'm not going to detention. I have a track meet this afternoon. So, I won't be able to fit detention into my schedule." Mr. Crum exclaims, "that's enough out of you!" Kathy interrupts, telling Mr. Crum, "and, that's enough out of you! Every time you have an itty bitty little problem, you call us all into your office and act like a complete jerk! All we were doing was standing around waiting for Bobby B. and Erika! And, do I have to remind you of all that other shit you pulled earlier this year? None of that went anywhere, and neither will this!"

Now quite angry with Kathy, Mr. Crum exclaims, "that does it, young lady! You're going to detention!" Kathy replies, "issue all the detention you want. See if I care. I'm not going because I have a track meet this afternoon. My schedule is booked." Knowing that she can go back into the past and fix any mess she causes, Kathy really tugs the line with Mr. Crum.

Mr. Zunde interrupts, boldly telling Mr. Crum, "Kathy is not going to detention. And, neither will anyone else in this room be going to detention. It's obvious that you're a bit on the angry side right now since you were just involved in a fight. Your adrenaline levels are quite elevated at the moment, so you're making decisions based upon emotion rather than logic. Kathy did exactly what she was supposed to do, which was to find a teacher. And, I'll take this opportunity to remind you that, in the past, you have attempted to suspend at least three students in this room on multiple occasions for breaking up fights in the past. If you had acted more rationally during those instances, someone might have stepped in and broken up the fight today. I really don't see that you have a case at all. Considering the importance of the meet this afternoon, if you do send anyone to this room to detention, you can be certain that I'll be discussing the matter with Dr. Brooks within the hour. And, let me remind you why Dr. Brooks hired me to begin with." Mr. Crum, hit with a sudden dose of reality, replies, "that won't be necessary."

Mr. Crum sits back in his chair, suddenly realizing that Mr. Zunde is right. Mr. Crum is quite angry because a student kicked his ass. Since the perpetrator is no where to be found, Mr. Crum is desperately looking for a scapegoat. Trying to save face, Mr. Crum announces, "okay. For now, I'm not sending anyone to detention." Knowing exactly what Mr. Crum is going to say next, Kathy orates in perfect sync with Mr. Crum, "but, I am going to have my eyes on every single one of you." Kathy then rolls her eyes, telling Mr. Crum, "where have we heard that before?" Mr. Crum exclaims, "that's enough! Everyone, get out of here! Now!" Wasting no time, the tribe leaves, followed by Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier.

In the school lobby, Mr. Zunde asks the group, "what exactly happened earlier?" Braden explains, "that Wadler guy gave Crum a sucker

punch, and gave him a noogie. We could have broken it up, but we didn't want to get suspended because of the meet today. So, Kathy went and got a teacher." Mr. Zunde asks, "that's it?" Braden replies, "yeah. I don't know why he's making such a big deal about it."

Mr. Zunde curiously asks, "I wonder why Mr. Crum didn't invite Mr. Harrison to his meeting." Kathy replies, "apparently, Mr. Harrison isn't included in 'everybody'. Imagine that." Mr. Frazier tells the group of athletes, "just hang low for the rest of the day, and we'll see you after school." Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier head back to the gym. The tribe heads to the lunchroom, now getting a mere fifteen minutes for lunch.

One Saturday, in the middle of the track season, Eddie rides over to Kathy's house. Now that the weather is warmer, they plan to head to the beach. When Eddie arrives, Kathy tells him, "I got some news!" Eddie replies, "it sounds like it's good news!" Kathy, who is all excited, replies, "yeah, it's good news all right! Guess what it is." Eddie guesses, "you got a job this Summer?" Kathy replies, "well, I do have my same job waiting for me. But, that's not it." Eddie then asks, "tell me." Kathy exclaims, "I got accepted to the University! But, that's not all!" Eddie replies, "that's awesome! What else?" Kathy exclaims, "I got a scholarship too!" Eddie replies, "that's even more awesome!"

Kathy tells Eddie, "the bad news is they don't want me for my brains. They want me for my body." Eddie remarks, "it's kind of hard separating the two. It's not like your brain can go to one college, and your body can go to another." Kathy tells Eddie, "they want me to run track, and they'll pay for my tuition if I do." Eddie points out to Kathy, "that's what you've been saying all along! They pay you to run." Kathy exclaims, "that's right! We've been telling the other teams that for a while!"

Kathy tells Eddie, "I got the inside scoop from my dad. He said they wanted to see how I did during the Spring season. They were deciding how much scholarship they were going to give me. That's why it took so long for me to get my letter." Kathy then tells Eddie, "and guess what else? I get to come back and whip your butt into shape! I get to help out with the team next year, like Barbara!" Eddie tells Kathy, "wow! It sounds like you got the whole package."

Kathy tells Eddie, "and, I know another secret!" Eddie tells Kathy, "I think I know this one!" Kathy tells Eddie, "oh, really? Tell me what you think!" Eddie tells Kathy, "Paula got one too." Kathy exclaims, "Edward Bogenskaya, I think that is the first time you've ever guessed and got it right!" Eddie reminds Kathy, "hey, I guessed right once before. It was that Christmas Eve when you wanted to get a pizza for lunch!" Kathy tells Eddie, "oh yeah, that's right! But, okay. So, we have to keep it a secret because Paula may not know yet. Or, maybe she's reading her letter right

now. She gets to come help with the team too. And, the best part is they are going to pay us to do it.” Eddie is happy that Kathy will be around for the next track season. It wouldn’t be quite the same without her.

Kathy tells Eddie, “before we go to the beach, I have to do my pool stuff.” They walk to the back yard, where Kathy checks the skimmers and the pool chemistry. Eddie looks over the pool, and tells Kathy, “hey, you have a visitor.” Kathy looks around the back yard and, seeing no one, asks, “who?” Eddie points to the bottom of the pool and tells her, “that little guy, down there.”

Kathy looks at the bottom of the pool, and sees a frog. Seeing the frog, Kathy exclaims, “oh no, you don’t! You’re out of here, buddy!” Kathy gets the leaf skimmer, and tries to get the frog out of the pool. She tells the little frog, “you’d better not die in my pool, otherwise I’m going to kill you.” After a little work, she catches the frog, and pulls him out of the water. She takes the skimmer holding the frog out to the front yard and down the street, and lets him out on someone’s yard who has a sprinkler running. She tells the frog, “you’ll be a whole lot happier here.”

When she returns to the back yard, Eddie tells her, “that’s what your pool guy should have been doing.” Kathy tells Eddie, “I’m glad you caught that.” Eddie tells her, “well, if I didn’t, the little guy would have jumped out of the pool, or the skimmer would have got him.” Kathy is reminded again why the skimmers should be checked every day. Kathy adjusts the chlorine level, and adds a minute amount of muriatic acid. Kathy is not about to have a run in with another dead frog, so she now keeps the pool clean, and the chemistry perfect.

Kathy sits down and tells Eddie, “I’m living at home when I’m in school. I don’t want to live in those dorms. This way, I can ride my bicycle to school on a nice day, and drive on other days. It’s only like a few miles away anyway.” Eddie mentions, “you’ll be all over the place. School, home, the track, the pizzeria. It’s a good thing you found your car when you did.” Kathy replies, “yeah. That worked out really well.” Kathy gives Eddie a hug and a kiss, telling him, “thank you so much for helping me with that.”

Kathy mentions to Eddie, “Paula’s been looking for a car. She’s not having much luck.” Eddie asks Kathy, “has she talked to Angelo?” Kathy replies, “no. She doesn’t even know Angelo.” Eddie tells Kathy, “if she tells Angelo what she wants, he can put the word out. It can’t hurt. You never know what he may come up with.” Kathy replies, “yeah, we need to do that sometime. We can like all go there together and tell Angelo.” Eddie says, “yeah, we can all ride in your car.” Kathy, knowing Eddie is joking, reminds him, “hey, we got three in there once!” Kathy asks, “speaking of cars, how’s the MGB coming?” Eddie replies, “it’s almost road

worthy. I was hoping to get it done before the Summer. At a half an hour a day, it moves along really slow.” Eddie is taking his time with the MGB. When he is done, it will be better than when it came from the factory.

Kathy’s mother tells Kathy that Paula is on the phone. Kathy knows exactly what the call is all about. So does Kathy’s mother. Paula filled Kathy’s mother in on every last detail. Kathy, who is really excited, drags Eddie inside by his arm, so she can talk with Paula. Eddie hears one half of the conversation, and can tell exactly what it is about. Paula got her letter of acceptance with a full tuition scholarship to the University, just like Kathy. Paula will be also working with the team next year. Kathy tells Paula that she and Eddie are going to the beach. From what Eddie can tell, Mark and Paula will be joining them. Kathy hangs up, and tells her mom that they are all going to the beach together.

Eddie and Kathy ride to Paula’s house, which is a slight detour on the way to Mark’s house. When they arrive at Paula’s house, Kathy and Paula give each other a high-five and a hip bump. They are both really happy that they both got scholarships to the same university, and will get to come back and work with the team. Paula packs up her stuff, and is ready to go to the beach. Kathy suggests that Paula stop by Angelo’s on the way and tell him what kind of car she wants. Paula thinks it’s a wonderful idea, so she calls Mark, telling him to meet them at Angelo’s. They head off to the beach, with a planned stop at Angelo’s on the way.

Eddie, Kathy, and Paula arrive at Angelo’s Service Station, and find Mark already there, waiting for them. Eddie introduces Paula and Mark to Angelo. They all talk for a few moments, then they get down to business.

Eddie tells Angelo, “Paula is looking for a car, and we thought that maybe you could help her out.” Angelo asks Paula, “what are you looking for?” Paula replies, “I start college next year, so I need something like really soon. I can’t ride my bicycle to college when it rains. What I really want is a Jeep CJ, but I’m afraid I’m on the path to getting anything that runs.” Angelo tells Paula, “well, if a CJ is what you’re looking for, you certainly have a lot of choices. A CJ is also easy to find parts for. The nice thing about them is you can easily customize them.” Kathy whispers to Eddie, “yeah, I was ‘looking for parts.’ I remember when Angelo said that to Mr. Malea.”

Paula tells Angelo, “I really don’t know exactly what I want. I just want a Jeep because I can put the top down. I’ve always hated to be stuck inside on nice days. Cars are the same way.” Angelo tells Paula, “I’ll tell you what I told Kathy. You’re going to pay top dollar in the retail market, so stay out of it. You’ll get something a whole lot better for your money if you put a little work into it.” Angelo, looking at Eddie, continues, “or, have Eddie and Mark put a little work into it. And, Kathy’s a good helper.

I've seen her work." Paula mentions, "I heard all about how Eddie fixed Kathy's engine." Angelo tells Paula, "well, let me see what I can do. I'll talk to Vinnie, across the street, and see what he knows."

After talking with Angelo, they all head to the beach. Instead of being worldwide travelers today, they decide to just ride to today's beach and enjoy the day. The ride to the beach goes much faster now. Kathy and Paula are in far better shape than they were a while ago. At a leisurely twenty miles per hour, they get to the beach in about a half hour.

The group arrives at the beach, finding that it is sparsely populated. Cars are pulling in one by one, a sure sign that it's going to be a good beach day. They lock up their bicycles, and head to the water. The familiar sound of waves crashing on the beach takes them into the world they love so much. After laying out their towels, Eddie and Kathy decide to take a walk to their favorite place. The field of sand dunes past the concession area is rarely visited, making it a perfect place for them to be alone. Mark and Paula decide to walk in the other direction, to their own favorite place. They all decide to meet back in an hour or so.

The sand dunes are, as usual, quite deserted. Kathy asks Eddie, "are you ready for your concert?" Eddie asks, "I'm getting a concert?" Kathy replies, "yeah, I'm the lead singer. Actually, I'm the only singer and I don't have a band. So, you're stuck with just me." Eddie tells his sweetie, "okay, I'm ready." Kathy sings *The Power of Love* to Eddie, and they dance like they do when they listen to the song at Kathy's house. Kathy, who has sung this song many times, knows the words to her song perfectly.

After Kathy's concert, they move to a small hollow between two sand dunes, and lay in the sand. Kathy tells Eddie, "over the Winter, when I was sick, I'd never thought I'd see this place again. Right here is my favorite place in the whole world." Kathy kisses Eddie, and what started out as a kiss becomes a passionate embrace. They caress and embrace each other, as Kathy feels, once again, that life has returned to her body. All they hear is the sound of each other breathing and the sound of waves crashing in the background.

Time flies by but, after a while, they head back to their towels. Mark and Paula have already returned, and have their feet in the water, which probably suggests that the water is a bit cooler than they expected. Eddie and Kathy sit on their towels and watch, as Mark and Paula seem to avoid getting splashed by the waves as they crash onto the beach. There are a few people in the water, but they are mostly kids.

As they lay in the sun, Kathy mentions to Eddie, "hey, look! Mark and Paula are turning into old people." Eddie asks, "what do you mean?" Kathy explains, "kids run straight into the water. Older people just get

their feet wet. You can tell how old somebody is by how fast they get into the water.” Eddie mentions, “you might have a point there.” Kathy continues, “and, the little kids, they can be freezing and turning blue, and they still won’t come out of the water. And, some older people will be burning up and they won’t get into the water to cool themselves off.” Eddie replies, “wow! You sound like you’re in college already.” Kathy tells Eddie, “the physics teacher, Miss Amherst, always says, ‘observe the world around you. You’ll be amazed at what you see.’”

Kathy tells Eddie, “hey! Let’s go run into the water like little kids!” Since they are being like little kids, Eddie replies, “the last one in is a rotten egg!” Eddie and Kathy get up and race to the water as competitively as they run on the track. Running right by Mark and Paula, Kathy and Eddie head straight into the water, barreling through a few small waves. It’s hard to tell who got to the water first, but it doesn’t matter. After a moment, the water doesn’t feel as cold as they thought. Mark and Paula decide to join them, but wade into the water slowly.

When Mark and Paula get close, Kathy tells Eddie, “see, they’re getting old.” Paula exclaims, “what do you mean, we’re ‘getting old?’” Kathy tells Paula, “you guys tip toe through the water like it’s cold or something.” Paula tells Kathy, “well, it is cold!” Kathy explains, “little kids run right into the water. Old people just get their toes wet. Who goes to the beach to just get their toes wet?” Paula realizes that Kathy has a point. Paula then walks right into the water, and Mark follows her. They quickly realize that the water wasn’t really that cold after all.

Kathy comments, “finally! They’re acting their age!” Hearing Kathy’s comment, Paula chases after Kathy in the water. Kathy, realizing that this might be another game of tag, swims away. Paula exclaims, “I’m going to get you!” Kathy yells back, “oh no, you won’t.” Mark and Eddie watch, as the two girls try to play a game of tag among the breaking waves. When Paula is about to catch her, Kathy runs onto the beach for moment, and goes back in the water a few yards down the beach. After a few iterations, Mark mentions to Eddie, “they’re really at it. I wonder who’s going to win.”

After a while, Paula catches up to Kathy, tags her, and yells out, “tag. You’re it.” Kathy tells Paula, “I let you catch me.” Paula replies, “did not!” Kathy quickly replies, “did so!” Paula replies back, “did not!” Kathy replies, “did so! And, you know it!” Paula replies, “oh no, you did not!” The verbal exchange continues for a bit, supported by childish facial expressions backing up their words to each other. They quickly realize that they are exchanging words like grade school kids. Kathy tells Paula, “okay, it worked. See that? You’re young again!” Paula tells Kathy, “okay, I’ll let you win this one.” Kathy replies, “uh huh. That’s because I did win.” The girls call a truce, but only because it’s time to get lunch.

After lunch, they lay on the beach for a while. Paula mentions, "I wonder if Angelo will find anything for me." Eddie tells Paula, "you might want to start looking for a Jeep yourself too." Paula asks, "I don't have a lot of money. Where do I look?" Eddie mentions, "cars get totaled all the time. The body is worthless, but the drive train could be in perfect condition. And, there are cars where the body is in perfect condition, but it cost too much to repair the engine, so they're junked. If you can find one of each, you'll get an awesome vehicle for next to nothing. You just have to put them together." Mark comments, "wow! I should start working on that myself." Paula asks, "how hard is that to do?" Eddie replies, "it's a whole lot easier than you'd think." Paula is now hopeful that she might be able to get the Jeep CJ that she's always wanted.

The group lies out on the beach for a while longer, and takes one more swim to cool off before they head back for the day. Before they hit the road, Paula mentions, "maybe there'll be a Pink CJ, the special Barbie version, for me waiting at Angelo's when we get back." Mark replies, "that would be way too easy." Kathy asks, "do they even make pink Jeeps?" Eddie replies, "I haven't seen one, but you can always have it painted." Paula tells everyone, "if I have it painted, I'm having the words 'Beach Patrol' painted on the sides." Mark replies, "that would be so cool!" They get to the road, and begin the trip home.

The Spring track season moves along well. The team, winning every meet, is very strong. Attendance at the meets is at an all-time high. The discus girl's fan club has gotten a lot larger. Eddie might just break the State record in the 100-yard dash and in the discus this year. Braden now runs the 440-yard dash consistently in less than 50 seconds. Akinmola is now a high jumper in addition to a distance runner. Mitchell has not lost a race all year, including cross country this past Autumn. Johnson is the best all-around track athlete the school has ever seen. Mr. Frazier can put Johnson in any event, and expect him to place¹ well. Bobby B. is untouchable. Bobby B. is now occasionally throwing the hammer. Erika, who hates to lose, has improved dramatically over the season. And, in the pool, Tessa has improved the force behind her flip turn and is now consistently placing in every meet.

Back in school, Chuckie is still alive, which is quite an accomplishment for the criminal in training. Chuckie now steers clear of Erika. Chuckie's mother still blames Eddie for Erika kicking the shit out of her little Chuckie. As far as Chuckie's mother is concerned, Eddie is to blame for everything. Chuckie awaits his trial for assaulting Erika. Braden might be called to testify in the case, which will certainly prove to be entertaining.

¹ Place: Taking first, second, or third place in an event.

If Braden is called to testify, the whole tribe has agreed to come and watch.

Courtesy of Braden, Jimmy O'Brien has earned the nickname "Jimmy O'Cryin." Jimmy O'Brien seems to have suffered more than a concussion on the track. He is now walking crooked and with a limp. Mr. Zunde suggested to Mr. O'Brien that Jimmy see a chiropractor. Mr. O'Brien might have taken that advice if someone other than Mr. Zunde suggested it. But, that's the kind of person Mr. O'Brien is. He rejects sound advice based upon the source, and will do the contrary just to prove his own idiotic opinion has far greater weight.

Since the incident with Jimmy O'Brien on the track, Mr. Crum has held a low profile. This is probably because he is still somewhat immobile. He sits in his office, counting down the number of days until his cast is removed. It turns out the fibula, the small non weight-bearing bone of the leg, is what was fractured. A fractured fibula is perhaps the best case scenario for anyone who has an argument with an airborne discus. Mr. Crum would have likely been killed if the discus hit him in the front of his neck. But, nevertheless, he still thinks someone is out to get him.

Jimmy O'Brien is not very competent on the track. In fact, Jimmy O'Brien is not competent at much of anything. O'Brien, who snuck back onto the track team during tryouts after being cut and caused a collision on the track, has a score to settle with Braden. O'Brien still thinks that Braden collided with him intentionally. So does O'Brien's father, Mr. O'Brien, the communist social studies teacher. O'Brien, upset that he has been cut from the team, has vowed to get back at those whom he believes are responsible for him not making the team. Waiting for an opportune time, O'Brien thinks he has found exactly the opening he was waiting for.

Wanting to find something to do to occupy his time, O'Brien has joined the photography club. While the track team is out on the track running drills after school, O'Brien is sitting in a classroom learning the difference between aperture priority and shutter priority. Unfortunately, learning the difference between the two exposure modes won't matter much to O'Brien. Whereas everyone else in the club has a 35-millimeter single lens reflex camera, O'Brien has a cheap point and shoot camera. O'Brien's point and shoot pocket camera has no ability to do anything but point and shoot. When it comes to taking photographs, O'Brien is pretty much stuck to settling for what you see might be what you get.

Planning to give the students some experience in shooting action shots, Miss Dey, the photography club advisor and photography class instructor, takes the club out to the schoolyard where the baseball team and track team are practicing. Neither Mr. Ryan, the baseball coach, nor Mr. Frazier, the track coach, care that the photography club often comes

out to photograph the action. Knowing that they are being photographed makes the athletes perform better. And, there is always the chance that one of the photographs could make its way into the yearbook or school newspaper.

Over in the field area, Kathy is practicing her discus throw, which is where the photography club congregates. Miss Dey explains to her students, "if you take notice, the girl is moving very fast when she releases the discus. A blurred photograph where you cannot see the athlete's facial expression is of absolutely no value. To get an awesome shot, you must stop the action. To stop the action, you must use a fast shutter speed. If your camera has a shutter priority mode, you can use that. Otherwise, you must set your camera in manual mode, and choose a shutter speed appropriate to stop the action. Please feel free to experiment with various shutter speeds to discover which speed is optimal for the scene. It is far better to experiment now versus during an actual competition."

Miss Dey asks Mr. Zunde, "we would like to get a few photographs of the girl throwing the discus. Where would be a good place to stand to get the shots?" Mr. Zunde replies, "that highly depends who is throwing the discus. Kathy, the girl you are talking about, has great accuracy in her throws. The students can stand off to the side, anywhere outside of the red zone. You can be sure Kathy won't hit anyone with the discus." If Jimmy O'Brien were throwing the discus, nowhere would be considered safe.

Knowing she is now the center of attention, Kathy gets onto the discus pad, ready to make another throw. Eight photographers have their cameras focused on Kathy as she goes into the spin. Miss Dey, herself, has her camera focused on Kathy, ready to catch the action. Kathy goes into the spin and, when she is about to release the discus, the sound of multiple shutter releases are heard. The discus soars through the air, landing far out into the red zone. Where the discus lands, however, is of no interest to the photographers. Their only interest lies between one second before and one second after the discus is released.

Miss Dey calls her group aside, telling them, "I hope you got some pretty good shots. Now, we're going to break into groups, and get a few more photographs of the action. Please be reminded to not interfere with the athletes while they are on the track or throwing their items. If there is any question of where to stand so that you are out of the way, please ask one of the coaches or the student assistants." After all, Miss Dey and the photography club would like to be invited back to photograph the athletes. Getting in an athlete's way does not pave the path to being invited back.

On the track, the athletes are running the relay drill. The only part of a relay race that is of interest to a photographer is the start, the finish, and the baton handoff. One group of photographers head over to the transition zone, hoping to get a few good shots of the handoff.

Waiting in line, Eddie mentions to Mark, "look at who's here with the photography club." Mark looks a little beyond the transition zone, and replies, "if it isn't Jimmy O'Brien. I wonder what he's doing here." Eddie suggests, "he's probably chasing after one of the girls in the photography club." Mark replies, "well, we know it ain't Lynn or Penny. They don't exactly like O'Brien."

As Hoffer approaches the transition zone, Mark steps onto the track, hoping to give the photographers a good show. Hoffer hands off to Mark, accompanied by the sound of several shutter releases.

Eddie walks over, and asks Lynn, "did you get any good shots today?" Lynn replies, "I think I got a really good shot of your girlfriend throwing the discus." Eddie tells Lynn, "you'll have to show it to me sometime." Eddie then curiously asks Lynn, "what's O'Brien doing here?" Lynn replies, "he joined the photography club a month ago. All he does is annoy the rest of us." Eddie laughs, and tells Lynn, "the photography club ought to have tryouts, like we do in track. Then, he can be cut from the club." Lynn laughs, and whispers to Eddie, "we all wish he would just leave. And, with his piece of shit camera, it's not like he's ever going to get any good photographs anyway." Eddie tells Lynn, "it's my turn," and gets on the track. Lynn replies, "I'll get a good shot of you!"

Track practice comes to a close, and the athletes and photographers head inside. On the way in, Miss Dey tells her group, "tomorrow, we will be developing your film and making prints. We'll see how well everyone did out here today. And, next week, before we get to work, we'll be discussing how to choose the right speed film and aperture settings for getting the desired depth of field when taking action shots."

The photography club meets on Tuesday and Wednesday. On Tuesday, they learn a few things in the classroom, then take photographs. On Wednesday, they develop their film, and see how well their photographs turned out. Truth is, the photography club can't wait to see the results of their work today.

In the locker room, having a hard workout today, the track team hits the showers. Braden asks anyone who may know, "what was O'Brien's ass doing out there today?" Eddie replies, "Lynn said he joined the photography club. I guess we'll be seeing a lot more of him at the meets." Braden exclaims, "just as long as he keeps his scrawny ass off the track, everything will be just fine." Braden clearly remembers when O'Brien

inappropriately stepped onto the track during tryouts, and caused a serious collision.

Sneaking into the locker room, O'Brien takes a careful look around. Hearing the conversation between Braden and a few others in the showers, O'Brien stealthily approaches, staying close to the wall. Cautiously placing his camera just past the wall, O'Brien snaps a quick photo of the guys in the shower. Braden, nor anyone else in the shower, is aware of O'Brien's nasty deed. Mark, however, catches O'Brien in the act, and swiftly confiscates O'Brien's camera.

Holding O'Brien's camera way over his head, Mark exclaims, "what was that shit all about, junior?" O'Brien screams out, "give me my camera!" Mark replies, "no. That ain't happening, junior." O'Brien jumps up, trying to repossess his camera, but has no such luck. Mark is far taller than O'Brien. Mark shoves O'Brien aside, walks back to his locker, and locks O'Brien's camera safely away. O'Brien argues with Mark, demanding the return of his camera.

Eddie comes out of the shower, asking Mark, "what's going on?" Mark replies, "O'Brien, here, snapped a picture of you guys in the shower." Suddenly very angry, Eddie stares at O'Brien, firmly telling him, "give me your camera, junior!" Mark informs Eddie, "don't worry. It's in my locker." Eddie asks Mark, "can I have it?" Mark replies, "sure." O'Brien, however, exclaims, "I want my camera back! You better give it to me!" Mark informs O'Brien, "that ain't happening, junior!"

Mark opens his locker, and hands O'Brien's camera to Eddie. O'Brien insists, "you'd better give me my camera!" Mark forcefully shoves O'Brien aside, who trips over his own uncoordinated feet and lands on the floor. Instead of confronting his adversaries, O'Brien heads straight to Mr. Crum's office to report that Mark and Eddie stole his camera.

Eddie tells Mark, "I'm going to get Lynn to develop the film tonight. If there's a picture of me in the shower, I'm kicking his scrawny ass." Mark replies, "good. I saw him take the picture. Now, I'm wondering what else he's got in that camera." Eddie tells Mark, "call me later, and I'll let you know." Mark replies, "you got it, bro." Eddie gets dressed, and heads out. Mark heads to the shower, hoping to get out of the school before Mr. Crum arrives.

Later that evening, Eddie rides his bicycle over to Mark's house. Eddie shows Mark the negatives and contact prints that Lynn made of O'Brien's film. Eddie points to the contact prints, and explains, "he got a few shots of us out on the track and a dozen pictures of Lynn. And, there it is. A picture of me and a few other guys in the shower." Mark exclaims, "what a piece of shit!" Eddie points out, "he really got a good shot of Braden."

Looking at the photograph, Mark replies, “Braden is really going to be ticked off.” Eddie mentions, “Lynn was really ticked off that O’Brien has been taking so many pictures of her.” Mark replies, “I can see that. She doesn’t like him at all.”

Mark asks, “what are we going to do with O’Brien’s camera?” Eddie replies, “destroy it.” Mark smiles, and replies, “how are you going to do that?” Eddie replies, “I’m not sure yet. But, I’m going to do it right in front of him.” Mark suggests, “we need to destroy the negatives too.” Eddie replies, “I’m going to do that, but not yet. It’s the only evidence I have. And, if that Mr. Crum tries to take the negatives from me, I’ll just kick his ass too.” Mark comments, “I definitely want to be there for that.” Eddie points out to Mark, “Mr. Crum will call us into his office tomorrow morning. You can be sure of that.” Mark and Eddie talk for a while longer, but it’s getting late. Eddie heads home, wondering what tomorrow will bring.

As expected, the next morning during second period, the announcement is made over the loudspeaker, “will James O’Brien, Edward Bogenskaya, Mark Svoboda, and Mr. Frazier please report to the administrative offices immediately.” In the gym, Mr. Zunde jokingly asks Mr. Frazier, “what have you done this time?” Mr. Frazier replies, “I don’t know. Perhaps one of the guys kicked the shit out of O’Brien after school yesterday.” Mr. Zunde tells Mr. Frazier, “let’s go and see what he’s up to this time. We’ve got a big meet tomorrow. We can’t afford anyone getting suspended.” Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde head to the administrative offices, wondering what the problem is today.

Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde walk into the administrative area, where Mrs. Marlowe informs them, “they’re already seated in Mr. Crum’s office. You can go right in.” Mrs. Marlowe then whispers, “Mr. O’Brien is in there too, and he’s pretty mad.” Mr. Zunde smiles, and replies, “good. He’s even more irrational when he’s mad.”

Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde walk into Mr. Crum’s office, seeing Mr. O’Brien, Jimmy O’Brien, Eddie, and Mark. Mr. Zunde asks, “what seems to be the problem today? Did Eddie or Mark prevent Jimmy from returning one of his overdue library books?” Mr. Crum brashly replies, “no! It’s much more serious than that.” With a sarcastic comeback, Mr. Zunde tells Mr. Crum, “something more serious? I see. Eddie and Mark must have been talking about Jimmy in class and hurt his feelings.” Mr. Crum fails to answer Mr. Zunde, clearly knowing that any response he offers will only dig him into a deeper hole. Eddie and Mark laugh, both knowing they are now off the hook.

Mr. Crum opens the meeting by stating, “yesterday, after track practice, Mark Svoboda is reported to have stolen a camera owned by

Jimmy O'Brien. This is a very serious matter. It is my understanding that, after taking the camera from Jimmy, Mark handed the camera to Eddie. Theft of personal property is not permitted in school, and I don't think that I have to remind anyone that theft is also against the law. I've already heard Jimmy's side of the story. So, before I suspend anyone, I want to find out exactly what happened yesterday." As Mr. Crum continues to babble, Mr. Zunde whispers to Mr. Frazier, "this is going to be good. If Mark took O'Brien's camera, I'm guessing he had a really good reason to do so."

Mr. Crum tells Mark, "tell me why you stole Jimmy's camera yesterday." Mark replies, "I didn't steal it. I confiscated it." Mr. Crum insists, "there's no difference. Now, please answer my question." Mark replies, "there is a difference. I didn't steal junior's camera. I confiscated it. And, besides, you always take away baseball cards from students. Are you stealing them, or are you confiscating them?" Mr. Crum exclaims, "I don't have time for this right now!" Mark asks, "does that mean I can leave now?" Mr. Crum exclaims, "no! I'm just getting started!"

Losing the argument, Mr. Crum sarcastically tells Mark, "okay, then. Please tell me why you confiscated Jimmy's camera," greatly emphasizing the word 'confiscated'. Mark bluntly and succinctly replies, "because that asshole took a picture of the guys in the shower." Silence comes over the room, broken by Jimmy O'Brien exclaiming, "I did not!" O'Brien is sincerely hoping that he can get his camera back before the film can be developed. O'Brien, however, has no idea that Lynn has a darkroom in her basement, and developed the film for Eddie last night.

Mr. Crum brilliantly announces, "someone here is lying." Fueling the fire, Mr. Zunde sarcastically asks, "what gives you that impression?" Mark replies to Mr. Crum, "it's O'Brien." O'Brien insists, "it is not! I want my camera back!" Eddie replies, "you'll get it back when you tell the truth, junior." Mr. Crum admonishes Eddie, telling him, "I haven't gotten to you yet!" Eddie sarcastically replies, "waiting." Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier stand in front of Mr. Crum's bookcase, wondering where this heated verbal ping pong match is going. Eddie, however, is only getting warmed up.

Mr. Crum tells Eddie, "since you want to talk, please explain to me what you did with Jimmy's camera after Mark gave it to you." Eddie replies, "I took the camera over to Lynn Berson's house. She developed the film. There were a few shots of us out on the track and a dozen pictures of Lynn. And, there was a picture of me, Braden, Johnson, Springer, and someone else in the shower. I can't make out who the fifth person was."

Breaking out in a sweat, O'Brien exclaims, "my camera must have gone off by itself!" Mark exclaims, "that's a bunch of bullshit! I saw you aim it, and shoot." Mr. Crum exclaims, "that's enough! I'm asking the questions here!" Mark sarcastically tells Mr. Crum, "I didn't ask a question."

Ignoring Mark for the moment, Mr. Crum asks Eddie, "how do you know what was on the film?" Eddie replies, "I told you. Weren't you listening to me? Lynn developed the film and made contact prints. I have the prints and negatives in my notebook, right here." Mr. Crum brashly insists, "show them to me!" Eddie takes the contact print out of his notebook, and shows it to Mr. Crum. Mr. Crum tries to take the print out of Eddie's hand, but Eddie will not let him. Mr. Crum boldly tells Eddie, "let me see this." Eddie replies, "you are seeing it." Mr. Crum sarcastically tells Eddie, "let me hold it, then." Eddie replies, "no." Mr. Crum tells Eddie, "unless you let me see this, I have half a mind to suspend you." Eddie replies, "go ahead. I don't care. My father told me that, if anyone takes the picture or negative from me, that I am to kick their ass and kick the ass of anyone who tries to stop me. Your call." Mr. Zunde smiles, and will be in no rush to stop Eddie should Eddie decide to kick the shit out of Mr. Crum. Not quite believing Eddie, Mr. Crum asks, "your father told you that?" Eddie replies, "yeah. And, he said that he'll finish the job on them if I don't. Go ahead and call him. I'm sure he'd like to finish off your desk while he's at it."

As Eddie stands his ground arguing with Mr. Crum, Mr. Frazier whispers to Mr. Zunde, "it looks like the guys are off the hook for this one." Mr. Zunde replies, "of course, they are. If there's a picture of the guys naked in the shower on that roll of film, O'Brien can be brought up on pornography charges. He could land in jail."

Stepping into the conversation, Mr. O'Brien insists, "I want Jimmy's camera returned, and I want it returned right now." Eddie replies, "he's not getting it back anytime soon. And, I don't have it. So, I can't give it back to him." In a quivering voice, Mr. O'Brien sternly tells Eddie, "you most certainly do have it!" Eddie replies, "well, since you know everything, go and find it yourself."

Trying to regain control of his meeting, Mr. Crum asks Eddie, "where is the camera now?" Eddie replies, "I don't know exactly where it is at the moment. But, I don't have it." Mr. Crum brashly tells Eddie, "that's it! I've heard enough out of you! I'm going to suspend you." Eddie replies, "go ahead. See if I care."

Mr. Zunde interrupts the meeting, informing Mr. Crum, "Crum, you're not suspending anyone, unless it's Jimmy O'Brien. A student expects and has a right to a certain level of privacy in the locker room and in the shower. Photographing a student in the shower is a clear violation of that

right. If there is, in fact, a naked picture of Eddie, Braden, Johnson, and Springer on that roll of film, the law would consider that pornography.”

Mr. Zunde then asks Eddie, “may I see the photograph?” Eddie hands the contact sheet to Mr. Zunde, and points out the photo of the guys in the shower. Mr. Crum is even more angry that Eddie freely allowed Mr. Zunde to hold the contact sheet when Mr. Crum was denied that privilege.

After examining the evidence, Mr. Zunde informs those present, “from what I see here, criminal and civil charges can be brought against Jimmy O’Brien in a court of law.” Focusing his attention to Mr. Crum, Mr. Zunde tells him, “you were right, Mr. Crum. This is a very serious matter. Perhaps we should get the police involved.” Hearing that the police could potentially be involved, both Mr. Crum and Mr. O’Brien look very worried.

Now realizing that his son, Jimmy, can potentially be in a lot of trouble, Mr. O’Brien tells Mr. Zunde, “all I want is for Jimmy’s camera to be returned to him. That shouldn’t be so difficult, now should it?” Mr. Zunde tells Mr. O’Brien, “that’s not my problem. It’s your problem. Why don’t you ask Eddie for the camera?” Mr. O’Brien informs Mr. Zunde, “I did! He’s not being very cooperative.” Mr. Zunde again tells Mr. O’Brien, “that would be your problem, not mine.”

Mr. O’Brien again boldly tells Eddie, “I want Jimmy’s camera returned to him.” Sounding a bit like Mr. Zunde, Eddie replies, “so what? That’s your problem, not mine.” Mr. O’Brien asks Eddie, “just how is that my problem?” Eddie finally explains, “I don’t have O’Brien’s camera. My father does. He told me that, if O’Brien wants his camera back, both you and that little squirt of a son of yours will have to see him to get it back. So, if you want the camera back, talk to my father. And, don’t be too surprised if he kicks your ass.”

Hearing Eddie’s boldness in maintaining his ground, Mr. Crum announces, “that’s enough! This meeting is getting nowhere. This is what I am going to do. I will have the secretary call Eddie’s father, and see if we can get him to come down to the school and return the camera. Until then, I am not going to make a decision about any disciplinary action that I might take.”

Dismissing the students, Mr. Crum announces, “Eddie, Mark, and Jimmy, you can go back to class now.” Addressing the physical education instructors, Mr. Crum tells Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde, “you both are dismissed.” Everyone walks out of Mr. Crum’s office, except for Mr. O’Brien. It’s anybody’s guess what the principal and the social studies teacher plan to discuss.

Out in the school lobby, Mr. Zunde asks Eddie, “did your father really tell you to kick the ass of anyone who takes those photographs from you?” Eddie replies, “yeah. He said he’d clean up the mess I made afterwards.” Mr. Zunde tells Eddie, “I shouldn’t say this, but I would like to have seen that.” Mr. Frazier mentions, “that’s two of us.” Mark adds, “make that three of us.” Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier head back to the gym. Eddie and Mark head back to class. Jimmy O’Brien, more embarrassed than ever, heads to the nurse’s office with a vague complaint of not feeling well, hoping to get out of school for the rest of the day.

One week later, Mr. Bogenskaya drives up to the school, parking his work truck in the no parking zone that is reserved for busses at the school’s entrance. Walking into the administrative area, Mr. Bogenskaya tells the secretary, Mrs. Marlowe, “get that Crum out here right now, please.” Mrs. Marlowe phones Mr. Crum, telling him that someone is here to see him.

Mr. Crum walks out of his office and, recognizing Mr. Bogenskaya, asks, “how can I help you?” Mr. Bogenskaya firmly tells Mr. Crum, “get that Jimmy O’Brien, Mr. O’Brien, and Eddie down here right now.” Not wanting any more furniture destroyed, Mr. Crum obliges, and instructs Mrs. Marlowe, “please call them all to my office.” Mrs. Marlowe announces over the public address system, “will Edward Bogenskaya, James O’Brien, and Mr. O’Brien please report to the administrative office immediately.”

Over in the gym, Mr. Zunde walks over to Mr. Frazier, and tells him, “I’ll be right back. I can’t even imagine what this is going to be about.” Mr. Frazier replies, “I’m coming with you.” Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde head to the administrative offices, preparing for the worst. Walking into the administrative area, Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier are instructed by Mrs. Marlowe to join the meeting in Mr. Crum’s office. Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier stand silently with their arms crossed, which worries Mr. Crum. Eddie is the last to arrive, relieved to see his father sitting in Mr. Crum’s office.

Mr. Crum opens the meeting, stating, “I see Mr. Bogenskaya is here to return Jimmy’s camera.” Mr. Bogenskaya interrupts Mr. Crum, telling him, “shut up. And, listen to me, you pencil pushing moron. Let’s get something straight. If any more photographs are taken of my son without his clothes on, what happens to that person will be their problem. Am I understood?” No one says anything, prompting Mr. Crum to reply, “I think we can all agree that an incident like that will not happen again.” Mr. Bogenskaya turns, looks at Jimmy O’Brien, and exclaims, “am I understood?” Trembling, O’Brien replies, “yes, sir.”

Mr. Bogenskaya places O’Brien’s camera on Mr. Crum’s desk, and announces, “here’s the camera.” The camera lies on the desk for fifteen

seconds, accompanied by dead silence in the room. Mr. O'Brien reaches for the camera but, before he can obtain it, Mr. Bogenskaya's fist comes crashing down on the camera, smashing it to pieces. Eddie, who already knew what was going to happen today, laughs hysterically. Mr. Zunde whispers to Mr. Frazier, "that was certainly worth the price of admission."

Mr. Bogenskaya stands up, and tells Mr. O'Brien, "you should have bought your son a better camera. That one is built like a piece of shit." Pointing to the camera that he just destroyed, Mr. Bogenskaya tells Jimmy O'Brien, "if you so much as point another camera at Eddie when he is naked, that's what's going to happen to you. And, don't come crying to the head of the pussy factory, here, when it happens." Mr. Bogenskaya then announces, "this meeting is over. Everyone, get back to work, or whatever you call it around here."

Out in the school lobby, Mr. Zunde tells Mr. Bogenskaya, "it's good to see you again." Mr. Bogenskaya replies, "it's good to see you and Mr. Frazier again. The track team is looking very strong this year. You both are to be commended." Mr. Zunde explains, "we've hit a few bumps in the road, but we're looking good going into the State meet. I suspect Eddie will walk away with a few gold medals." Mr. Bogenskaya replies, "Eddie has been training hard. He's really looking forward to the meet. I'll be there watching with Nina." Mr. Frazier comments, "we've been doing good at keeping Mr. Crum at bay. But, it seems that he's on the warpath again." Mr. Bogenskaya laughs, and replies, "I sincerely hope I helped you guys out today." Mr. Frazier informs Mr. Bogenskaya, "you certainly did. Thank you."

Eddie heads back to class. Mr. Bogenskaya talks with Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde in the lobby for quite a while, annoying Mr. Crum. While Mr. Bogenskaya has a high regard for Eddie's coaches, Mr. Crum is at the top of his shit list. Not surprisingly, Mr. O'Brien now occupies the number two slot on that list. Mr. Crum, not wanting any further confrontation, hides out in his office, waiting for Mr. Bogenskaya to leave.

Toward the end of the semester, Mr. Frazier has some good news for the team, so he has the team assemble in the auxiliary gym before they go out to the track and practice. The invitations have been distributed for the Spring State invitational meet, and Mr. Frazier plans to make the announcement. But, everyone already knows what this meeting is about, and looking forward to hearing the news. Mr. Frazier will also have a few other announcements to make regarding next year's season.

Mr. Frazier and Barbara walk into the gym together. Barbara has a seat with Kathy and Paula, while Mr. Frazier looks over a few papers. The team is already assembled on the bleachers. After a minute, Mr. Frazier opens by telling the team, "this has been the best and most talented team

I have seen since I've been coaching. Every one of you is to be congratulated for your fine performance this year. Before I make an announcement, Barbara will give you some information that I want you to listen to carefully. What she is going to tell you will make a big difference next year."

Barbara walks up and, with her British accent much more noticeable today, tells the team, "this year, this team has the potential to be the most decorated track team in the history of this State. Next year, in order to be equally as successful, we all need to do something between the end of this track season and next Winter. Some of you already do this, but, for the rest of you, what I am going to tell you will make or break the team next year." The team is wondering what magical advice Barbara is going to offer.

Barbara begins with her advice, telling the team, "this Summer, if you want to excel next year, you are going to have to run, work out, swim, and do anything else you can to maintain and improve your physical fitness. You can be sure that the other local teams will be doing the same. How do I know this? Some of the local high schools approached the University, looking for advice on improving their team's performance. Many of the other schools will be hiring interns, like me, next year. By the way, all of you are responsible for them seeking this advice by not losing a single meet in the last three years, and shutting out three opponents this year." The team claps and cheers. The team was not even remotely aware of the impact they have made in the area. Such dominance, however, will apparently be met with drastic changes by the other regional teams.

Barbara then gives the floor back to Mr. Frazier. Mr. Frazier tells the team, "next year is not going to be as easy. Mr. Ruff and Mr. Parker might just start their own Amazon exploration. I'm going to go to Paradise Island and Africa again this Summer. If anyone wants to come and help me find new talent, let me know." The team laughs, and the Amazon cheer begins. Mr. Frazier knows he has the best team around, and the team clearly knows that Mr. Frazier is the best coach around.

After a moment, Mr. Frazier tells the team, "okay, it's time to get down to business. First, some good news. There is a guy in middle school who can run a 100-yard dash in 10.3 seconds. Another guy can run the 440 in 56 seconds, and there is a five-minute miler coming up next year." Eddie whispers to Mark, "the guy who runs the 10.3 is my brother." Mark replies, "that's not bad, 10.3 seconds. I wonder who the other guys are."

Eddie whispers to Mark, "Mr. Frazier just announced what's coming up next year from middle school. That's probably how Mahoney found out about us a few years ago." Mark whispers back, "I think you're right about that."

And, that is exactly how Mahoney found out about Eddie and Mark. When Eddie and Mark were finishing up middle school, at the end of the track season, Mr. Frazier announced to the high school track team, “here’s some interesting and good news. There are two guys in middle school who run the 100-yard dash in 10.1 seconds! Their 4 by 440 relay team is faster than ours! Every single one of the runners on that relay team can run a 55 or 56-second quarter mile! And, they’re in middle school! And, their miler is faster than anyone on our team. Matt Wood, listen up. You might have some competition in the shot-put next year! I could not believe what I was seeing!” After hearing Mr. Frazier’s announcement, Mahoney worried about Eddie and Mark all Summer long before his senior year. Instead of worrying, Mahoney should have been training.

As Eddie and Mark are whispering to each other, Mr. Frazier announces, “twelve of you are going to State this year in ten events. This beats last year. Are you ready to hear who is going?” Eddie and Mark now pay attention.

The team cheers, and then Mr. Frazier announces, “in the 100-yard dash, we have Eddie and Kathy. In the 220-yard dash, we have Mark and Paula. In the 440-yard dash, Braden will be kicking ass.” The team laughs at Mr. Frazier’s commentary. Looking at his clipboard, Mr. Frazier continues, “this is a big surprise to me. In the 880-yard run, we have Johnson, Mitchell, and Akinmola all going. In the mile, we have Mitchell and Akinmola both going. Now, for the relays. In the 4 by 440 relay, Eddie, Mark, Kathy, and Paula will be running in their last season together. In the mile medley relay, it will be Johnson, Braden, Akinmola, and Mitchell. Also new to this year is the 4 by 220 relay team, which is Johnson, Erika, Hoffer, and Elliot. And, in the field events, Bobby B. will be throwing the shot-put, and Eddie will be throwing the discus.” Hearing the news, the entire team cheers.

Mr. Frazier continues, “every one of you that I have mentioned has the potential to walk away with a gold medal in your event. And, as Barbara hinted to earlier, next year is going to be more difficult. So, when we get out to the track today, remember this. All of you are not only training for the remainder of this season, but for next year’s season too!” Mr. Frazier dismisses the team, and everyone heads out to the track.

Kathy, Paula, and Barbara all walk out to the track together. On the way, Kathy asks Barbara, “when did you hear about the other schools wanting interns too?” Barbara replies, “this week. You guys are the first to know. I’m sure your dad will have more details than I do.” Kathy replies, “he’s mostly involved in his research. He actually just runs the State meets for fun.”

Paula mentions, “it sounds like we’re going to have to work harder next year.” Kathy tells Paula, “we won’t be here next year. We’ll be at the University.” Paula, totally forgetting she is graduating this year, replies, “okay, I don’t want to hear it. That’s about the dumbest thing I’ve said all year.” Paula looks at Kathy, and says, “don’t even say it!” Kathy smiles, and asks, “say what?” Paula replies, “you were going to say ‘no, it’s not,’ and then I was going to chase you.” Kathy and Paula decide to save their energy for practice today.

Kathy and Paula get to the track, ready to run today’s drill. Since the next meet is a few days away, Mr. Frazier will be running his favorite drill for the sprinters and distance group. The drill, which is a variation of Fartlek² training developed in Sweden, is not anyone’s favorite drill. During this drill, the distance runners will be running on the outside of the track for about an hour. After every mile, they will drop to the inside of the track, and run 440 yards as fast as they can as if it were the final lap of the race. They will then drop to the outside of the track, and run another mile. Any distance race that is more than 440 yards is nothing more than a 440-yard dash with a prolonged warm-up before the final sprint. After fifteen minutes, they will get a five-minute rehydration break. When the runners are fatigued, the distances are changed to a half mile of distance running coupled with a 220-yard sprint. This drill will get the distance runners accustomed to what they are to expect in competition.

The sprinters will be sprinting on the inside of the track for one lap, or 440 yards, then drop to the outside, taking a recovery lap with the distance group. After the recovery lap, they will sprint for another 440 yards. Once they cannot sprint for 440 yards effectively, the sprinting distance is dropped to 220 yards with a 440-yard recovery lap. The sprinting distance will be then dropped to 110 yards once the sprinters have difficulty with sprinting 220 yards. And, like the distance runners, they will get a five-minute break after fifteen minutes. This is a difficult workout for everyone. Since the workout is not only aerobic, but also highly anaerobic, Mr. Frazier will give the team tomorrow off to fully recover.

During the workout, Mr. Frazier and Barbara notice someone sitting on the bleachers with a notebook appearing to be doing homework. Mr. Frazier asks Wendy if she recognizes the guy. Wendy tells him that she has never seen the person before. Mr. Frazier is, for some reason, disturbed by the person on the bleachers. During the team’s five-minute rehydration break, Mr. Frazier and Barbara walk over to investigate.

² Fartlek: Swedish for “speed play”, Fartlek training is “fast running” intermixed with “slow running”.

They walk up to the bleachers, discovering the guy is too old to be a high school student, and is perhaps a college student. Mr. Frazier asks the guy, "may I ask why you are watching my practice session?" Surprisingly, the guy responds, "sure. I'm documenting this team's workouts. This track team wins all the time, and I'm finding out how." Mr. Frazier bluntly replies, "no, you're not. Get out of here." The guy replies, "but, it's part of my assignment." Mr. Frazier replies, asking, "what assignment?" The guy becomes increasingly nervous. Barbara mentions, "wait a second! I know you! You ran for Centerville a few years ago." Barbara worked for Mr. Frazier as a team assistant for three years, and recognized the guy as one of their better distance guys from years ago, but she cannot remember his name.

Mr. Frazier asks to see the guy's notes. The guy refuses to show Mr. Frazier the notebook, telling him, "I don't have to do that." Mr. Frazier, who is now ticked off, asks the guy, "where do you go to school?" The guy is reluctant to answer, but Barbara points out to Mr. Frazier the cover of his notebook. The cover has the name of the college he attends proudly embossed on the front. Fortunately, it is not the State University that Barbara attends.

Mr. Frazier, in a demanding tone, asks, "I suggest you start explaining." The guy replies, "I think I'd just rather leave." Mr. Frazier tells him, "good! And, if I ever see you here again," pointing to the athletes now running around the track, "these guys will give you a workout you'll never forget. And, no one will have seen a thing." The guy promptly leaves, walking away knowing that he has been busted.

Mr. Frazier tells Barbara, "it's started. They're sending their spies here to study our workouts and find out how we win." Barbara tells Mr. Frazier, "I'm almost positive that guy ran for Centerville back when they were good." Mr. Frazier replies, "I'm sure he did, because he didn't deny it. After you mentioned that, he suddenly became silent and uncooperative. That's a dead giveaway." Barbara mentions, "I don't think we'll be seeing him again anytime soon." Mr. Frazier mentions, "we'll watch out for him at the meets." Barbara asks, "do you still have our notes from way back then?" Mr. Frazier replies, "they're still in the filing cabinet." Barbara suggests, "let's take a look when we get back. Maybe I'll recognize his name."

After the grueling workout, the team heads to the locker room. On the way, Kathy mentions to Paula, "aren't you glad you didn't start chasing me?" Paula replies, "yeah, I'd say. That was some workout." Eddie comments, "that drill is pretty much a game of Kill the Man with the Ball without a ball." Mark mentions, "yeah. Maybe we should suggest another game of Kill the Man with the Ball." Eddie suggests, "hey, we can

just bring the ball to the drill, and play along the track.” Mark replies, “that would almost be called football.”

While the team is getting showered and dressed, Mr. Frazier and Barbara go into the physical education office. They search through the filing cabinet for the notes from years ago. They both really want to know who that guy on the bleachers was. Barbara finds the file with notes from the time when she was a freshman.

They look through the file, finding the name of a Centerville miler who was a junior at that time. Barbara mentions to Mr. Frazier, “this might be the guy, Brad Evans.” They find the files from the time when Barbara was a sophomore, and find the guy, who was then a senior, was in fact, a reasonably good distance man. Mr. Frazier mentions, “yeah, there he is again. His times have definitely improved from the prior year. I remember that. Back then, we had no one who could beat him.” Looking over the notes, Barbara mentions, “that’s definitely the guy. That would make him a junior in college right now.” Barbara tells Mr. Frazier, “well, I guess that’s the best compliment we can receive from a competitor.”

Now, Mr. Frazier has another problem to contend with, but it is not a big problem. It is not what is done during practice that makes the team strong. It is what Barbara mentioned to the team before practice that makes or breaks the team. The workouts that are done during the off season are what makes the biggest difference of all. Unless Centerville’s newly-hired spy intern, Brad Evans, follows Eddie, Mark, and the rest of the team around all Summer, he will not have discovered any valuable information. A notebook with notes that read, “they run around the track for an hour,” is hardly of any value. Sitting on the bleachers, it would be hard to discover with certainty what is actually going on during the drill. But, the fact that Mr. Frazier threw him out suggests that there is some secret workout going on. That will certainly spur some future interest.

Later in the week, Paula stops by Angelo’s Service Station to see if he has found anything yet. Paula walks in, and asks Angelo, “hey! Do you remember me?” Angelo replies, “yeah! You’re the girl who wants a CJ.” Paula replies, “yeah, that would be me.” Angelo asks, “did you find anything yet?” Paula replies, “no. Not yet. And, I’m running out of time.”

Angelo tells Paula, “I might have some good news for you soon.” Paula asks, “really? What kind of good news?” Angelo tells Paula, “Vinnie tells me there’s going to be a CJ coming into his shop in a week or so. I’m not sure exactly what happened to it, but the guy doesn’t want it back. I hear that it still runs good. If I were you, I’d check back with me next week. This could be a good deal.”

With the possibility of good news on the horizon, Paula is a little more excited, but still kind of stressed. Angelo, seeing that Paula is stressed, tells her not to worry so much. Paula thanks Angelo again, and tells him she'll be back in a week.

The team practices almost daily. With the State invitational meet, graduation, and the Summer right around the corner, everyone's schedule is loaded down to the max. Mr. Frazier is very excited about this year's State invitational meet.

Barbara has caught the Centerville spy, Brad Evans, spying on the team once again. She noticed him when she drove up before practice one day. This time, he was sitting in his parked car with a pair of binoculars, hoping to see something. Finding this out, Mr. Frazier decided to forgo the usual practice session and have the team play a game of Kill the Man with the Ball. Barbara told Mr. Frazier that documenting that the team plays Kill the Man with the Ball during practice will really look good in Evan's notes.

Eddie's MGB is also coming along well. He expects to be able to drive it this Summer. The engine, which was completely rebuilt, runs well. The suspension has been reworked, and an anti-sway bar has been added. Eddie also added anti-tramp bars to stabilize the rear leaf springs during hard acceleration. The battery has been moved to the trunk, and the battery box behind the seats is now a hidden storage area. While there is not much left to do, Eddie's problem is finding the time to do it.

Chuckie's attorney has filed a guilty plea, and Chuckie has agreed to do 624 hours of community service for snapping Erika's bra and giving her a wedgie. Chuckie's mother asked the judge how he came up with 624 hours. The judge explained to Chuckie's mother that 624 hours is eight hours on Saturday, and four hours on Sunday for the next year. The judge further explains that, with Chuckie's record, he is doing Chuckie a favor by keeping him off the streets and preventing him from getting in more trouble. Chuckie had the nerve to ask the judge why nothing happened to Erika for beating him up. The judge explained that he is very lucky that Erika beat him up, and the ass kicking he received by Erika was nothing compared to what would happen to him should he go to jail.

Mr. Crum finally got his cast off, and limps around the school just like Jimmy O'Brien. Now that he is mobile again, he is acting like his usual crabby self. He often resurrects the issue about being hit by the discus, but everyone on the track team seems to have amnesia regarding the issue. No one can remember who threw the discus that Mr. Crum's leg intercepted on the field. Although Mr. Crum is doing everything he can to find out who threw the discus, even if he did find out, nothing can be

done about it anyway. Accidents happen, and the accident with the discus was his own fault.

On the Saturday of the State invitational meet, the team meets at the school early in the morning, dresses, and gets on the bus. This year, there is also a spectator bus to bring the students who are coming to watch. The Amazon banner from last year has made its way onto the bus, and will remind the competition who's boss. The team is ready to leave and, since the spectator bus is full, the overflow fills the team's bus. The bus drivers have to leave a few people behind, but one of them tells the students that he will be back for a second run.

On the way, Eddie and Kathy watch the scenery go by. They have ridden these roads dozens of times on their bicycles. Next year, Kathy will take these same roads to college.

When the bus arrives at the State University, the team unloads the equipment with the help of the spectators. The boxes of towels, Gatorade, chests of ice, cases of water, a long extension cord, and the large electric fan are all carried to the team's bench. A few of the students head up to the stands to hang the Amazon banner. Since they got there early, the fans get the choice seats in the bleachers. For the next half hour, the stands fill with spectators and the teams arrive one by one.

Barbara decides to take a walk by the Centerville bench to see if she can spot Brad Evans. At the Centerville bench is their 4 by 440 relay team, which is actually a reasonably good team. They just seem to have a serious performance block whenever they run against Mark. Their worst performance of the year is always against Northside. In fact, no one can figure out how the Centerville 4 by 440 relay team can always make it this far, and perform so poorly during the State invitational meet. Barbara casually walks by their bench and, sure enough, Evans is walking around in the area minding everyone else's business.

The meet gets underway, and the hurdlers get on the track. This year's controversy is already brewing before the first gun goes off. Brad Evans walks by the Northside bench and is taking notes. He apparently knows who's who, and what events they are running. This year, Bobby B., Erika, and Akinmola are at the center of the controversy. The controversy surrounding Kathy and Paula, however, has not gone away. The Centerville prodigy, Evans, reports what he has seen, or rather what he thinks he has seen, to Mr. Ruff, who will begin spreading rumors shortly. One could only imagine what kind of information Evans is reporting to Mr. Ruff.

The 100-yard dash preliminaries are up after the hurdles, so Eddie and Kathy warm up. Eddie is the number one seed again this year. Kathy is the number two seed, and will be running next to Eddie. As in previous years, the six fastest times of the morning will make it to the final. This year, Eddie and Kathy have no real competition. Kathy, however, has the chance to break the women's 100-yard dash State record. Eddie tells her that he will help her break the record by running as fast as he can.

The call is made for the 100-yard dash. Mr. Frazier, Eddie, and Kathy head for the starting line. When the other sprinters arrive, the Amazon chant begins. One of the runners, who apparently has never been to a State-level meet, comments, "what is all this Amazon crap?" Kathy replies, "that's my cheering section. All that cheering is for me. It's all mine. It's not for you."

The focus shifts to Kathy, who, now at six feet tall, towers over most of the other runners. The runners in the heat are too busy looking over Kathy, wondering whether she is from the Amazon like they have heard. Kathy whispers to Eddie, "same behavior, different group." Everyone ignores Eddie, the fastest guy in the State.

The Starter tells the runners in the first heat to get ready. Kathy tells the other runners, "now, when the gun goes off, don't forget to run, and the finish line is that way," as she points down the track. Kathy is treating the best runners in the State as if they are part of her Summer camp gym class for kids. Kathy then mentions to the other runners, "and, please don't forget to make sure that both of your shoelaces are tied." Kathy's comments perturb the other runners, who quickly realize Kathy is talking to them like little children. A few of them are really ticked off because they are being treated by Kathy as if this is their first race.

The Starter announces, "on your marks," catching some of the ticked off runners off guard. Seeing the runners ready, the Starter announces, "set." The gun is fired, and Kathy lets out her primal scream, literally scaring the crap out of some of the runners. One runner actually got so scared, he stopped running right out of the blocks, thinking something was seriously wrong. Unfortunately, that is his problem, and he will not get a chance to run again. Eddie is used to hearing Kathy's primal scream, which does not bother him in the least.

Eddie and Kathy, who always seem to be out of the blocks first, take an early lead. With one runner out of the race, the field is quickly whittled down. One of the runners, who got annoyed by Kathy's pre-race instructions, actually falls to the ground after a few yards. The nature of the runner's issue is unclear. He could have tripped or strained a muscle. Overall, this is the worst possible start one could hope for among the top

seeds in the 100-yard dash. Two of the top runners are out of the race, and it's not because of their skill level.

Halfway through the race, Eddie is in first place, Kathy is in second place, and the two remaining runners are distantly in last place. Eddie crosses the finish line first, and Kathy second, right behind the fastest guy in the stadium. Kathy and Eddie exchange high-fives, and walk toward Mr. Frazier, who is standing in the coach's area.

Following the race, Eddie, Kathy, and Mr. Frazier all walk back to the bench together. Mr. Frazier tells them, "both of you did really good!" Kathy asks, "what was my time?" Mr. Frazier replies, "you're off by a tenth or two," meaning she is off the State record by that much. Mr. Frazier reassures Eddie and Kathy that they will both make it to the final. Sounding a little like Braden, Mr. Frazier, wondering why they even bother to have a final, mentions, "they should just move on to the next event. You guys have it wrapped up." The field this year surprisingly looks worse than last year. After the race, Eddie and Kathy take some time to rest on the bench.

The order of events has been changed because of the number of Northside runners participating in multiple events. The mile is up next, which would normally be run later. Barbara accompanies Mitchell and Akinmola to the starting line. On the way, Barbara explains to Akinmola that these runners are the best in the State, and to try not to fall behind. Akinmola is used to taking second place, finishing shortly after Mitchell takes first place. Today, however, there will be real competition in the field. Akinmola will soon find out where his skill level really lies.

The milers begin to congregate around the starting line. One of the runners asks Akinmola, "hey, are you that guy from Africa?" Akinmola replies, "why do you want to know?" The guy replies, "if you are him, the word got around that you're fast." Akinmola replies, asking, "are people talking about me?" The guy replies, "yeah. A lot. The rumor is that your coach went to Africa to get you." Akinmola smiles and tells him, "I met my coach before I moved here. But, I flew here on the plane myself."

No one is going to get any information out of Akinmola. When he says anything, he answers very vaguely and increases any suspicion that he may not be here legitimately. Standing around listening to the conversation is Brad Evans, the Centerville spy, who is minding everyone else's business at the starting line.

Evans talks to Mr. Ruff, letting him know what he heard. Mr. Ruff is angry that John McNamara, the Centerville miler, is not seeded as high as Akinmola. Evans and Mr. Ruff also talk with Rudy Parker, the Henderson High School coach. Zak Ward, the Henderson miler, and John McNamara,

the Centerville miler, were supposed to be battling it out with Mitchell this year for first place. They are not at all happy that Akinmola, a sophomore, has come out of nowhere and landed a highly seeded position in the State invitational meet. What is of particular concern to Mr. Ruff and Mr. Parker is that, since McNamara and Ward are seniors, this is the last year that they will be running. This is their last chance to medal, and the odds are not looking good for one of them.

The one-mile run begins, and Mitchell takes an early lead. He knows that, if Akinmola takes the lead, Akinmola is likely to win. Between Mitchell and Akinmola, this will be a fight to the finish. Behind Mitchell and Akinmola is John Cavallari, running for Northport, followed by McNamara and Ward. Ten yards behind Ward, a bunched-up pack of runners begins to form.

Halfway through the race, the mile is quickly becoming a race between Mitchell, Akinmola, and Cavallari. McNamara and Ward run head to head, but they are slowly losing ground. Mr. Ruff and Mr. Parker are now wondering where Cavallari came from. This is the first time they've ever seen him run. But, since the competitors are from all over the State, the coaches cannot expect to know everyone.

Standing in the coach's area, Mr. Ruff sarcastically tells Mr. Frazier, "it looks like Northport picked up some competition for you." Mr. Frazier, looking at his clipboard, then glancing at the spread of runners on the track, authoritatively tells Mr. Ruff, "that's John Cavallari. He's expected to take third place. Northport paid me a lot of money for him. They wanted Akinmola, but I wasn't willing to give him up." No one gets the upper hand in psychological warfare against Northside. Mr. Frazier has now given Mr. Ruff one more thing to be concerned about. Mr. Frazier also underhandedly informed Mr. Ruff that John McNamara will be going home empty handed today.

During the last lap, Mitchell and Akinmola are far enough ahead that, barring a spectacular finish by Cavallari, they will not be caught. Ward takes a slight lead over McNamara, battling it out for the title of the first loser. With about 220 yards to go, Mitchell is still in the lead, being pressured by Akinmola. Cavallari closes the gap, but with 100 yards remaining, he cannot overtake Akinmola.

At the finish line, Mitchell takes first place, Akinmola takes second place, and Cavallari takes third place. Ward, running for Henderson, who earned third place last year, takes fourth place this year. McNamara, running for Centerville, takes fifth place. After the race is over, Ward can be seen sobbing as he walks away from the finish line. McNamara, who is also not too happy, clearly displays his disgust.

Eddie and Kathy are reminded by Mr. Frazier that the 100-yard dash final follows the mile. The call is made and Mr. Frazier, Eddie, and Kathy go to the starting line. On the way, Mr. Frazier tells Eddie and Kathy that Jay Draper, who runs for Riverdale, is running in the 100-yard dash final, and is their only real competition. Mark and Paula both beat Draper last year in the 220-yard dash. Draper could have possibly beaten Paula, but the psychological warfare before that race was quite intense. Mr. Frazier informs Eddie and Kathy that Mark and Paula really twisted up Draper's mind last year. Kathy also remembers Draper from last year's 4 by 440 relay. Of most importance, however, is that Draper has a very short fuse.

While they are waiting, Kathy, using a preschool teacher's voice, tells the finalists, "everybody please check and make sure your shoelaces are tied. Someone fell down earlier today on the track. We must remember to be very careful at all times." The Starter mentions, "she has a point. The contender who fell down earlier tripped over his own shoelaces. Let's not let that happen again." Kathy then tells the finalists in her preschool teacher's voice, "I hope to see all of you at the finish line. I'll be waiting there for you."

For some reason, the other finalists are really annoyed by Kathy's pre-race antics. After all, this is the final for the 100-yard dash, and it's serious business. Duane Harris, running for Central, is particularly annoyed by Kathy's comments. Kathy beat Harris last year in this same race, so Harris has a score to settle. Harris is quite calm compared with Draper, who is having a shit fit listening to Kathy. But, Draper has a short fuse, so Kathy uses it to her advantage. The other two runners don't seem to be as annoyed, but they'll probably lose anyway.

The Starter tells everyone to get ready. They walk up to the blocks, and the Amazon cheer begins. Kathy tells the other runners, "now remember, they're all cheering for me. I'm so sorry that no one showed up to cheer for you guys." Draper complains to the Starter, telling him, "can't you tell her to shut up?" The Starter ignores Draper, and announces, "on your marks." The Starter announces, "set," and the Amazon cheer gets louder. When the gun is fired, Eddie and Kathy are out of the blocks faster than their hopelessly distracted competition.

Kathy's pre-race comments really irritated some of the other runners, particularly Draper. It was easy to see how Mark and Paula pissed him off so much last year. Draper has a very short fuse, which is apparently connected to a nuclear weapon. And Harris, who is actually an excellent athlete, is tired of being beaten by Kathy.

Eddie is in first place, and knows Kathy is right behind him. Kathy is focused on catching Eddie. With 50 yards remaining, it does not look like anyone will catch Kathy, much less Eddie. With 25 yards remaining, no

one is within reach of Eddie or Kathy. Draper and Harris battle it out for third place, with Harris having a slight advantage. Eddie crosses first, with Kathy following close behind. Harris finishes in a distant third place, and Draper gets a participation trophy this year.

Eddie and Kathy congratulate each other with a victory hug, a high-five, and a kiss. Eddie puts Kathy on his shoulders, and the crowd goes wild. Eddie and Kathy take a victory walk down the track, as Kathy waves to the crowd.

When they return to the bench, Dr. Karakova, the Meet Director and Kathy's father, gives them some good news. Dr. Karakova confidentially informs Mr. Frazier, Eddie, and Kathy that Eddie just broke the State record and Kathy broke the State record for women in the 100-yard dash. He also tells them to not mention it until later, since the times have to be verified. That would help explain why the third place winner, Harris, finished so far behind.

Eddie takes a short rest before he has to go and throw the discus. Kathy wants pizza, but she knows she can't have one until dinner. And, Kathy, who is hungry at the moment, wants to wait for Eddie before she gets lunch. Braden is ready to run the 440-yard dash, and Mr. Frazier accompanies him to the starting line. The 4 by 220 relay will be up after the 440-yard dash.

There is a lot going on at the meet today, including a controversy brewing with Mr. Ruff, the Centerville coach and Mr. Parker, the Henderson coach. Both coaches seriously believe that Akinmola is ineligible to run. Zak Ward, who ran the mile for Henderson, would take third place if Akinmola is found to be ineligible. Centerville, who will be up against Northside in the 4 by 440 relay later, has nothing to lose by attempting to take down Mr. Frazier for the first time. Mr. Ruff and Mr. Parker now both also believe that Bobby B. is in college, and throws the shot-put to earn his tuition money. Mr. Ruff and Mr. Parker somehow convince Mr. Lyons, the Riverdale coach, of Mr. Frazier's gross violations of the rules that affect them all.

Meanwhile, Eddie heads to the field event area, finding Bobby B. and Mr. Zunde. Bobby B., so far, has claim to the winning throw in the shot-put. The Head Field Judge understands Eddie is also participating in track events, so he works him into the rotation as quickly as he can. Eddie warms up and talks with Mr. Zunde, as he waits for his call. Mr. Zunde informs Eddie that the best throw so far is around 175 feet by Mark Miller, who throws for Jefferson. Miller took the silver medal in the discus last year, and is expecting to win the gold medal this year.

Eddie is called for his turn. Eddie steps up to the discus pad, and takes a look around, noticing that there are many people watching. Eddie, taking his time, goes into his wind up, and into the spin. He releases the discus and lets out a primal scream that rivals Kathy's. The discus soars through the air, catching the attention of all of the discus competitors. Eddie returns to the bench, and sits with Mr. Zunde and Bobby B. Mr. Zunde tells Eddie, "congratulations! You just won the gold medal!" Eddie replies, "how do you know?" Mr. Zunde tells him, "your throw crossed the 200-foot line. No one has come close to that in years."

The measurement comes in, and is 202 feet, 8 inches. Mr. Zunde tells Eddie, "that about wraps up the discus." Eddie asks Mr. Zunde, "Kathy wants to eat lunch. Do I have to throw it again?" Mr. Zunde tells him, "technically, no. But you should take your three throws anyway. It would look better if you did."

Eddie sits on the bench, talking to Bobby B. and Mr. Zunde, waiting for his next throw. While he is waiting, Mark Miller steps up to make his second attempt. Miller is painfully aware of the distance of Eddie's first throw, and knows he must seriously step up his game if he is to win. Miller was under the false impression that, with Brad Sheffield gone, he would be winning the gold medal this year.

Miller makes his second attempt, and the discus lands just beyond the 175-foot line. He apparently cannot deliver the distance needed to win the gold medal, and will have to settle for the silver medal again. Miller, who is a junior this year, will have a lot of work to do before next year if he wants to win the gold medal.

Eddie's second and third attempts come in at about the same distance as his first attempt. Eddie already knows that he won, so there is no need for any additional effort just to prove a point. Mr. Zunde congratulates Eddie, and tells him that he can go and eat lunch with Kathy now. Eddie decides to wait for a moment, so he can watch as Bobby B. makes his final attempt at the shot-put. Bobby B. already has the winning throw of the day, but wants to surpass his best throw. Bobby B's. throw is good, but is just a few inches shy of his best of the day.

Just as Eddie gets up to leave, Mr. Ruff, the Centerville coach, and his spy, Brad Evans, walk over to call an unsolicited meeting with Mr. Zunde. After Mr. Ruff not so cordially introduces himself, he tells Mr. Zunde, "I have something to say to you. I am constantly hearing that your shot-put guy, Robert Bradshaw, is in college and throwing the shot is how he makes his tuition money." Mr. Zunde, perceiving the malice in Mr. Ruff's voice, replies, "so what." Mr. Zunde really does not want to be bothered with such nonsense but, since Mr. Ruff wants to discuss it, Mr. Zunde is up for a little free comedy. Mr. Ruff replies, "so what?" Is that all you

have to say?" Mr. Zunde replies, asking, "what else would you like me to say?"

Bobby B., hearing his name, walks over with Eddie to see what the problem might be. Bobby B. asks Mr. Zunde, "what's up?" Mr. Zunde tells Bobby B., "Mr. Ruff, here, seems to think that you throw the shot-put to make tuition money for college." Bobby B., who has heard this rumor before, tells Mr. Ruff, "I have no comment." Mr. Zunde asks Mr. Ruff, "does that answer your question?" Mr. Ruff replies, "yes. It absolutely does." Mr. Zunde replies, "how could he have answered your question? He never addressed the issue one way or another." Mr. Ruff replies, "oh yes, he did. By refusing to comment, he's saying that he makes his tuition money for college by throwing the shot-put."

Lowering the boom, Mr. Zunde tells Mr. Ruff in no uncertain terms, "that's your whole problem, Ruff. Your team is pretty much of middle school caliber. And, you run around during every meet, blaming others for your incompetency as a coach. If you'd spend your time developing your team's skills, you might not get shut out next year. You pulled this same shit last year and made a fool of yourself. If you want to do it again, and make a bigger fool of yourself this year, be my guest. I am not going to stop you." Mr. Zunde certainly tells it like it is.

Mr. Ruff, annoyed by the truth, tells Mr. Zunde, "you people have got to be stopped!" Mr. Zunde tells Mr. Ruff, "exactly. And, your job, as a coach, is to stop us on the track. That's the nature of competition. Unless you learn that, you'll never get anywhere, either on the track or in life." Mr. Ruff is getting nowhere with Mr. Zunde, so he walks away with his spy, figuring out what to do next. As far as anyone knows, no one has ever won an argument, such as the one Mr. Ruff started, with Mr. Zunde.

Kathy and Eddie head to the University cafeteria to get some lunch. Eddie tells Kathy, "I have some good news! I won the discus." Kathy gives Eddie a high-five, and replies, "awesome! We need to celebrate!" Eddie knows where Kathy is going with this. She wants her pizza, but it's going to have to wait until after the meet.

Eddie also fills Kathy in on the scene made by Mr. Ruff. After hearing about the encounter, Kathy replies, "wow! It sounds like Mr. Zunde really put Mr. Ruff in his place! I can't wait to hear what Mr. Ruff has to say to Mr. Frazier and my father later." Everyone knows that a confrontation is coming. Dr. Karakova lends a deaf ear to Mr. Ruff, and is tired of his nonsense. And, Mr. Frazier will ride with the tide and go with the flow. If he's lucky, Mr. Frazier might even get the opportunity to start a new rumor.

After lunch, Kathy tells Eddie, "I want my yearly nap now. Can we, please?" Eddie replies, "yeah. Let's go and do that. We can go to that place where we went to take a nap last year." They find the student lounge, and find a place to rest for a while. The student lounge is air conditioned, so they are not standing out in the heat all afternoon. Standing in the heat for two or three hours before a race is not conducive to good performance. The 4 by 440 relay is the last event of the day, so Eddie and Kathy have a while before they need to be ready.

After their nap, Eddie and Kathy return to the team bench. Mark and Paula fill them in on the event results that they've missed. Paula relates that Mark won the 220-yard dash, and she got second place, barely beating out the guy who edged her out during the indoor track season. Braden won the 440-yard dash, and the 4 by 220 relay team won gold. The mile medley team has just finished their run, and it appears that they are headed back to the bench with Mr. Frazier. Eddie tells Paula that he won the discus, but he finds out that someone had already told her.

Mr. Frazier is ecstatic at the team's performance this year. With the whole team together, Mr. Frazier takes this opportunity to congratulate the group. Mr. Frazier informs the other team members, "the mile medley team just had their best run of the year! They'll probably take the gold medal, but we'll have to wait and see." A voice is heard from behind Mr. Frazier, stating, "that's because one of the runners is from Africa, and shouldn't even be here at the meet. He's here illegally." The voice is that of none other than Mr. Ruff, the Centerville coach.

Mr. Ruff, his protégé, Brad Evans, and Mr. Parker, the coach from Henderson, approach Mr. Frazier, and ambush the Northside bench. It's not hard to figure out what this surprise attack is about. Mr. Frazier has already been informed by Mr. Zunde about Mr. Ruff's childish behavior earlier today. Mr. Frazier has been expecting a visit from Mr. Ruff all day. The team is well aware of the accusations made against them, which they all know are false. To the team, the rumors are all fun and games. Unfortunately, Mr. Ruff has no sense of humor coupled with no sense at all. That makes him pretty much a jerk.

Mr. Frazier asks Mr. Ruff, "what exactly is your problem?" Mr. Ruff, in a heated rant, tells Mr. Frazier, in front of his team, "you picked this guy up from Africa, and he stole a medal in the mile! And now, he stole another medal in the mile medley relay!"

Akinmola stands up, points at Mr. Ruff, and exclaims, "are you talking about me?" Mr. Ruff points to Akinmola, and replies, "yeah! I'm talking about you!" Akinmola walks up to Mr. Ruff, telling him off, exclaiming, "I didn't steal anything! I work hard for everything I get, and winning is no different. And, I am not here illegally. My family moved here at the end of

the Winter. They picked Mr. Frazier's high school for me because he's the best coach around with the best team. I'm glad my father didn't pick your school! When we ran against you in the beginning of the year, I couldn't believe how weak your team was. But, now I know why. Do you understand me?" Kathy whispers to Paula, "he fits in really good!" Akinmola certainly put Mr. Ruff in his place.

Braden stands up, and interrupts Akinmola, directing his rants at Mr. Ruff, exclaiming, "you're so full of shit. Your sorry ass team ain't won shit all year, and you keep getting your ass kicked. And we're going to kick it again next year. You just watch!"

Braden then points to the Henderson coach, Mr. Parker, and rants, "and we're going to kick your ass next year too, just like we did this year! Your team is nothing but a bunch of cry babies. Like your mile guy today, who cried like a little baby with a wet diaper when he lost! My grandmother can run faster than anyone on your team!"

Braden again points to the Centerville coach, Mr. Ruff, and exclaims, "and, there's one more race later! These guys," pointing collectively to Eddie, Mark, Kathy, and Paula, "are gonna kick your ass so bad, you ain't gonna know what happened! You just wait and see! That's gonna be the biggest ass kicking of this meet! And, when you wake up tomorrow morning, your ass is gonna hurt so bad, you won't be able to get out of bed! Then, you'll be wondering why your ass hurts so bad. And then, you'll remember it's because your ass got kicked right here!"

Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde stand with their arms crossed, allowing the team to take care of Mr. Ruff and his henchmen. Mr. Ruff, trying to combat the heated discussion, spouts off, "how about these two girls from the Amazon?"

Kathy, just waiting for her turn, stands up and tells Mr. Ruff, "get it straight, junior. We're not from the Amazon. We're from Paradise Island." Mr. Ruff exclaims, "see? I told you!" Kathy continues, "look it up on the map, you moron! Paradise Island doesn't even exist. Haven't you ever heard about Wonder Woman? Geesh! And, they let you teach school? You must really be a special kind of stupid to even believe that. And, just for your information, none of us get paid to run! And, Bobby B. is not in college, and doesn't get paid to throw the shot-put!" Braden adds, "yeah! We all kick your ass free of charge."

Kathy walks right in front of Mr. Ruff, looking him straight in the eye, asking him, "by the way, junior, did you forget to take your medication today?" Mr. Ruff replies, "no," letting the cat out of the bag that he apparently takes some sort of medication. Kathy brilliantly replies, "well, then, maybe they need to increase the dose!" Mark comments, "he's been

taking way too much of that psycho Chubin!” The entire Northside bench laughs, as Mr. Ruff hits himself on the side of his head with his hand. Mr. Ruff was blind sided by Kathy just as easily as his team is blind sided by Mark during every meet. The question of the day would now be what kind of medication Mr. Ruff is taking.

Mr. Ruff, Brad Evans, and Mr. Parker finally get a good close-up look at the Northside team. The Northside athletes are all physically much better developed than Mr. Ruff originally thought. Mr. Ruff and his cohorts have found out that the Northside team is just as competitive in standing their ground using verbal combat as they are on the track. This, for some reason, is extremely worrisome to Mr. Ruff.

After Mr. Ruff has been verbally beaten down, Mr. Frazier asks, “is there anything else we can help you with today?” Mr. Ruff replies, “I’ve had it with you guys. You don’t take anything seriously!” Braden exclaims, “yes, we do! Winning!” Mr. Ruff and his buddies walk away. Mark yells out, “hey! Don’t forget to tell McCutchen to check his shoelaces.” The Northside team laughs, as Mr. Ruff walks away, defeated once again.

On their walk back to their benches, Mr. Parker exclaims, “did you see the size of those guys?” Evans replies, “I’ve never seen anyone that big when I ran for Centerville.” Mr. Ruff exclaims, “they’re all almost as big as Mr. Zunde, and that’s big! And, the shot-put guy, he’s huge! I had no idea he was that big! And the women! Two of them are six feet tall and must weigh 180 pounds.” Evans, trying to earn Brownie points for his internship, remarks, “no one on the college team is as big as those guys.” Mr. Ruff concludes, “they all must be taking steroids. That’s the only explanation.” Mr. Parker replies, “that sounds reasonable to me. The size of those guys is unbelievable.” Mr. Ruff mentions, “I hate to say it, but I think we all just witnessed a case of ‘roid rage.” There you have it. Mr. Ruff thinks he has figured it out. Everyone on Mr. Frazier’s team is on steroids. That would explain both their performance and their size.

Well, that settles it. Mr. Frazier and the team have put an end to all the rumors. The Amazon rumor is over. The Paradise Island rumor is over. The short-lived Africa rumor is over. The rumor that the athletes get paid is over. It was fun for the team while it lasted. But, in the wake of squelching all the rumors, another rumor has been born in its place. The new rumor is that everyone on the Northside team is taking steroids.

The call for the final event is made, and the 4 by 440 relay team, along with Mr. Frazier, heads to the starting line. The teams arrive one by one, and Mark finds McCutchen among the same Centerville team they beat during the indoor track season. The crowd sees Kathy and Paula as they wave, and the Amazon chant once again begins. Kathy tells the other

relay teams, “those cheers are for us, not you guys,” as if the other teams didn’t know that already.

Mark asks McCutchen, “hey, what’s eating at your coach?” McCutchen asks, “what are you talking about?” Mark replies, “someone must have peed in his cornflakes this morning. He came over to our bench crying like a baby because you guys can never win.” Mr. Ruff, overhearing Mark’s comments, tells his 4 by 440 relay team, “stay focused. Don’t let him distract you.” Mark tells McCutchen, and his relay team, “yeah. Stay focused. Stay focused on losing, because that’s what you’re going to do.”

Mr. Frazier, Eddie, Kathy, and Paula have been listening to Mark’s verbal exchange with McCutchen. Mr. Frazier asks the rest of the relay team, “how does Mark come up with this stuff?” Eddie tells Mr. Frazier, “I’ve known Mark a long time. He was born that way.” Paula tells Mr. Frazier, “and, take a look at their team. They look like they’ve lost already.”

The Starter tells the first heat to get on the track. Once everyone is in position, the command, “on your marks,” is given by the Starter, quickly followed by, “set.” Everyone gets set, and the gun is fired. Mark takes an early lead, running his best because the girls want another medal, and this is the last race of their senior year. McCutchen watches, along with Mr. Ruff, as Mark makes the trip around the track look so easy. Paula waves to the crowd as she steps onto the track. As Mark approaches the transition zone, the Amazon chant gets louder.

Paula receives the baton, and appears to run around the track as effortlessly as Mark just did. Once Mark has recovered to some degree, Mr. Frazier tells him that he ran a 48-second quarter mile. Mr. Ruff overhears Mr. Frazier telling Mark his time, and clearly expresses his disgust. On the cheerier side, Kathy waves to the crowd as she gets onto the track.

Paula hands off to Kathy, who lets out a primal scream that startles some of the runners. This is Kathy’s last high school run, and she’s determined to make it a memorable one. Halfway through Kathy’s lap, Mr. Frazier looks at his stopwatch, and tells Eddie, “she’s on track for a personal record.” Eddie gets onto the track, waiting for Kathy. McCutchen looks over at Mark as he gets on the track. Mark just smiles, and points to McCutchen’s shoes. Mr. Ruff cannot understand how Mark can deliver a 48-second quarter mile so effortlessly, and still have the energy to make fun of McCutchen.

Kathy hands off to Eddie, and finds a place to lie down as she watches Eddie run his leg. Paula tells Mark, “I guess this is it for us. This is our last race.” As Eddie makes his way around the track, Mr. Ruff is overheard

saying, “they make it look so easy!” Today, for some reason, Mr. Ruff is more focused on watching Northside run, rather than watching his own team. Kathy stands up as Eddie approaches the finish line. Eddie crosses the finish line first, and the team cheers, giving each other high-fives.

Eddie and Kathy hug each other. While they are walking back to the bench, a tear comes from Kathy’s eye, as she tells him, “it’s over, Eddie. I’m so sad. I’m not coming back next year to run with you.” Eddie tells Kathy, “but, you made all this happen! Two years is better than not running at all. You’ll be back next year as a coach.” Kathy replies, “yeah, I guess you’re right. I was given my chance, and I won.” Eddie reminds Kathy, “you had to fight Mr. Crum to get here, and then you had to fight everyone on the track to win.” Kathy reminds herself and Eddie, whispering, “and we had to fight for my life too. That was harder than winning today.”

The team decides to get dinner before the awards ceremony. Following the precedent set last year, Mr. Frazier tells the team that he is buying dinner for everyone. There was no bet this year, but Mr. Frazier figures it’s the least that he can do for his team. They all head to the cafeteria, where pizza is waiting for them and Mr. Frazier.

After dinner, they head back to the team’s bench. The stadium has been set up for the awards ceremony while they were away. The announcement is made for the winners of each event to move to the shot-put pad. Everyone on the Northside team has won something today, so the team heads to the shot-put pad, waiting for their name to be called.

The program comes to the 100-yard dash. The Meet Announcer announces, “setting a new State record in the 100-yard dash, running for Northside High School, first place goes to Edward Bogenskaya.” The crowd cheers, as Eddie walks up and stands on the first place tier. The Meet Announcer then announces, “also setting a new State record for women in the 100-yard dash, also running for Northside High, second place goes to Katarina Karakova.” The crowd goes wild, hearing that Kathy has broken the women’s State record. The Meet Announcer announces “in third place, running for Central High School, Duane Harris.”

Once the medalists are on their tiers, the meet officials drape the medals around the winners’ necks. Kathy and Eddie each get an additional special medal for breaking the State record. Photographs of the winners are taken, mostly of Kathy, who is the center of attention today. Eddie and Kathy return to the shot-put area, waiting to be called for their other events.

The ceremony moves along quickly. Mark takes the gold medal in the 220-yard dash and Paula takes the silver medal this year. Braden takes

the gold medal in the 440-yard dash. In the 880-yard run, Johnson takes the gold medal, and Mitchell takes the silver medal. In the mile, Mitchell takes the gold medal and Akinmola takes the silver medal. In the relay events, three relay teams walk away with medals. Johnson, Erika, Hoffer, and Elliot win the silver medal in the 4 by 220 relay. Johnson, Braden, Akinmola, and Mitchell win the gold medal in the mile medley relay. And, in the 4 by 440 relay, Mark, Kathy, Paula, and Eddie win the gold medal for the second year in a row. In the field events, Bobby B. wins the gold medal in the shot-put. And Eddie, new to the discus this year, wins the gold medal in that event.

After the ceremony, the parents come down from the bleachers, and join the medalists in their celebration. The same group that met during last year's victory celebration has a reunion this year. Eddie's parents congratulate him and the other team members. Erika's father is very surprised that she made it to the State invitational meet and actually won a medal. Akinmola's parents meet Mr. Frazier again, and are also very surprised that Adekunle has done so well this year.

College scouts, reporters, and photographers make their way to the Northside bench, and attempt to talk with anyone they can. Unfortunate for the scouts, Kathy and Paula, who are the only seniors, have already committed to a college. A few of the scouts try to get Eddie interested in going to college. Eddie tells them that he wants to be a mechanic. The scouts try to convince Eddie to get a business degree or whatever else they may offer at their schools. Eddie simply tells the scouts that he doesn't want to push a pencil around for the rest of his life.

The team, wearing their medals, poses for a team photograph with Mr. Frazier, Mr. Zunde, Barbara, and Wendy. Mr. Frazier answers a lot of the reporter's questions. Mr. Frazier is inundated with questions about Amazon women, runners getting paid to win, and going to Africa to pick up a few new runners. Mr. Frazier tells the reporters that Mr. Ruff is spreading those rumors, and that he'll have the whole Summer to conjure up new ones. Mr. Frazier tells the reporters to not believe anything that Mr. Ruff or Mr. Parker say, but just be entertained by what they come up with next. With a new style of psychological warfare, Mr. Frazier has just completely discredited Mr. Ruff and Mr. Parker.

On Monday morning, following the meet, Eddie, Kathy, and the tribe, all hang out on the front lawn of the school. With their medals draped around their necks, the group celebrates again. The medalists get a lot of high-fives from their friends as they get off their busses. Eddie tries to talk Daniel Gaspari, known as Gump on the football field, into trying out for the shot-put or discus next year. Gaspari, who is not on a Spring sports team, has about a year to consider Eddie's offer. Even Chuckie

gives recognition to the group, flipping them a bird on his way into school.

The week for final exams arrives, so there will be tests followed by more tests. With one more week to go, Summer vacation is right on the horizon. Kathy and Paula are counting down the days until graduation. This will be a long and busy week for everyone. But, once the week is over, a few weeks of freedom begins.

The final bell of the school year rings, which means graduation is the next day. Since the weather is nice, graduation will be held out on the track. There is much more seating in the bleachers than in the auditorium, so the track is the preferred place to hold graduation.

The final bell of the year also brings bad news for some students. Mr. Frazier failed Chuckie and Jimmy O'Brien in gym class this year, as recommended by Mr. Zunde. Since gym is a required subject, they will both be sweating outside, trying to pass the class in the Summer heat. But, since they both want to be on the track team, the Summer workouts should get their sorry asses into better shape.

On the morning of graduation, Kathy and Paula are all ready to receive their diplomas and move on. Kathy's and Paula's parents, who have known each other since their girls have been in kindergarten, have waited for this moment for a long time. Eddie and Mark will be also watching from the bleachers as their girlfriends graduate. They are not accustomed to sitting on the bleachers. Their place is on the track. Next year at this time, Eddie and Mark will be graduating, taking their last walk on the track as students.

The bleachers begin to fill with the parents and friends of the graduates. Eddie and Mark find Kathy's and Paula's parents, and sit with them. Kathy's mother asks Eddie, "how did you guys get here? I don't see your bicycles." Eddie and Mark usually walk or bicycle everywhere they go. Eddie replies, "I drove my MGB. Today is its maiden voyage." Kathy's father replies, "wow! So, it's finished! I've heard all about your MGB for the last year. I'll have to see it sometime." Mark tells everyone, "it seems to run fine. It got us here." Eddie tells Mark, "of course it runs fine, bro. What did you expect?"

The commencement activities begin on schedule. Everyone focuses their attention to the stage, which has been set up on the field where Mr. Crum got hit by the discus a few months ago. Everyone says the Pledge of Allegiance, followed by the band playing the National Anthem. The invocation this year is given by Dr. Kristibueze Akinmola, who is a preacher that, as only the track team knows, moved from Nigeria in late Winter. Dr. Akinmola is the father of Adekunle Akinmola, so the track

team knows him well. Dr. Akinmola's first name, Kristibueze, is quite fitting. The translation and meaning of his name in English is "Christ is King." After the invocation, the superintendent of schools gives her address. The superintendent's address is followed by the valedictorian's and salutatorian's address.

The administrators get ready to distribute the diplomas to the graduates. While they are getting ready for the main ceremony, the parents begin to have a few personal conversations in the bleachers. Out of the blue, a girl, dressed in a swimsuit, comes out of the woods and sprints along the track between the bleachers and the field where the ceremony is about to begin. She takes a lap around the track, and waves to the crowd. The Amazon chant begins, which is started by Mark, Eddie, and a few of their friends. This year's senior prank, organized by the track team, turns out to be a huge hit. After the lap around the track, Erika runs back into the woods, disappearing until next Autumn. Everyone enjoyed the prank, except for Mr. Crum, which is to be expected. But, there is nothing Mr. Crum can do. There is no rule against what Erika did, and besides, school is technically no longer in session.

The ceremony gets underway, and the graduates walk up one by one to receive their diplomas. They are called up in alphabetical order, so Paula, as always, goes before Kathy. Mr. Crum, the principal, calls Paula's name, announcing, "Paula Giovani, Summa Cum Laude." It must have killed Mr. Crum to proclaim the words "summa cum laude" after Paula's name, but that's the way it goes. Paula is draped with gold tassels, signifying her academic excellence. Paula is also wearing every single one of her track medals today which, for some reason, irritates Mr. Crum. Paula shakes Mr. Crum's hand, takes two steps, and the school superintendent, Dr. Noreen Brooks, hands Paula her diploma. Paula walks off stage, and returns to her seat.

The ceremony moves on, and Mr. Crum calls Kathy's name, announcing, "Katarina Karakova, Summa Cum Laude." Kathy, also draped with gold tassels and wearing her track medals, walks up, and shakes Mr. Crum's hand. After shaking Mr. Crum's hand, Kathy pats Mr. Crum on the head, and speaks into the microphone, "Mr. Crum, you're in the red zone." The entire group of graduates starts laughing hysterically. All of the graduates learned one thing this year. After Mr. Crum got in the way of the discus, everyone in the school, including the teachers, learned what the red zone is, and to stay out of it. Dr. Brooks even laughs at Kathy's remark. Kathy takes two steps, and Dr. Brooks hands Kathy her diploma. Kathy walks off stage, and takes her seat.

After the closing ceremony, caps fly into the air and the graduates cheer. The parents come down from the bleachers and meet the graduates, teachers, and administrators. The whole crowd mingles for

quite a while. Many of the parents have not seen each other since their kids were in grade school. Graduation is a sort of reunion for many of the parents. Everyone talks about their plans after graduation, about where they are going to college, and what they will be doing this Summer.

Mr. Zunde personally congratulates Kathy and Paula, who are standing with their parents, Eddie, Mark, and a few others. Eddie and Mark both congratulate Kathy and Paula. Mr. Zunde tells Eddie and Mark that next year it's their turn. Mr. Zunde tells Kathy that her telling Mr. Crum that he is standing in the red zone will probably go down in school history.

While Mr. Zunde is talking to Kathy's and Paula's parents, the superintendent, Dr. Brooks comes over and gives her cousin, Mr. Zunde, a hug. Kathy and Paula both get special congratulations, and a hug, from Dr. Brooks. Dr. Brooks addresses Eddie and Mark by name, and shakes their hands. She tells them that she occasionally attends the home meets. Dr. Brooks tells Eddie and Mark to keep up the good work, and that the track team has given the district a really good reputation over the last few years. Eddie and Mark are both very surprised that the superintendent of schools knows them by name and of their accomplishments.

After graduation, Kathy, Eddie, Paula, Mark, and a few of Kathy and Paula's friends head over to Kathy's house for her graduation party. The pool is warm enough to swim in, so everyone brings their swimsuit. Already at Kathy's house is Joe, from the pizzeria, delivering Kathy's preferred graduation meal. There will be enough pizza, calzones, and side dishes for everyone. And, there will probably be enough pizza left over for a few days. Kathy has invited all of her friends from the track team to the party. Erika is already there, waiting in her swimsuit, after taking her lap around the track earlier today.

Kathy arrives home, followed by Eddie and Mark in Eddie's MGB. This is the first time Kathy has seen the MGB on the road, so she wants a ride in it before her graduation party. Eddie tries to convince her to take the ride later, but she will not hear of it. She's been waiting for almost a year to see the MGB on the road, so she wants her ride now. Kathy gets in, and Eddie gives her a short ride around the block. Kathy is very impressed by the ride and how fun the car feels to drive, especially with the top down.

When they arrive back at Kathy's house, Eddie convinces her to go into the back yard and make sure the pizza has been delivered and to make sure there are no dead frogs in the skimmers. As far as Kathy is concerned, checking on pizza can wait, but the thought of a dead frog in the skimmers is enough reason to check right now. They walk through the gate, and a crowd exclaims, "happy graduation!" Kathy whispers to Eddie, "no wonder you didn't want to give me my ride now." Eddie

whispers back, “yeah. They’ve been waiting. And, there are no dead frogs. I checked your pool on the way to graduation.” Kathy whispers to Eddie, “the party was supposed to start in an hour.” Eddie replies, “we changed that when you weren’t looking.” Kathy walks into the back yard, seeing all the familiar faces from the track team and school.

Mark is talking with Braden, telling him that Kathy told Mr. Crum that he was in the red zone when she received her diploma. Braden wishes he were there to see that. But, you never know, it could happen again next year. Kathy’s comment, as Mr. Zunde suspected, will apparently go down in school history. With all the crap Mr. Crum put Kathy through over the years, Kathy got the last laugh.

Kathy and Paula get the first slice of pizza, then everyone else digs in. Erika, already having her workout today, wastes no time reaching for a slice. She ran all the way from her house to the school, took her lap around the track, and then ran to Kathy’s house. Ready for lunch a while ago, Erika has had to look at the pizza for what seems like hours.

Bobby B. threatens to do a cannonball into the pool, and everyone steps back. He then tells everyone he was only joking, and that he’d hate to get the pizza wet. No one wants to eat soggy pizza. Bobby B. takes a few slices, saving the cannonball for later.

While everyone is eating, Eddie mentions to Bobby B., “hey. Did you know that there is a discus pad in the elementary school behind Kathy’s house?” Bobby B. replies, “no. It wasn’t there when I went there.” Eddie tells Bobby B., who lives around the corner, “you should paint a shot-put ring next to the discus pad so you can practice.” Bobby B. asks Eddie, “where did the discus ring come from?” Eddie tells Bobby B., “Kathy had absolutely nothing to do with it.” Bobby B. mentions, “maybe she can paint one for me.”

After lunch, the pool becomes the center of attention. Everyone gets in the pool and relaxes for a while. Tessa reminds Eddie about the rematch this Summer at the county pool. Tessa assures Eddie that she will beat him this time. Eddie tells Tessa that she not only won’t win, but doesn’t even stand a chance. Eddie’s comment worries Tessa a bit. Perhaps Eddie has a few cards he’s not showing. Johnson tells Tessa that the county pool has been closed for a while because Eddie cracked the concrete side wall while doing a flip turn. Tessa doesn’t believe that for a second, but a few people might have if Tessa hadn’t laughed off Johnson’s comment. But, today is not a day for a rematch. That will have to wait a few more weeks.

The party goes on until late afternoon, when many of the guests begin to head home. Kathy, and some of her best friends, stay around for the

evening party, which wasn't planned, but is happening anyway. Paula and Mark have been in and out of the pool all afternoon. They get out of the pool to get another bite to eat, and then head back into the water.

When the sun begins to go down, Kathy lies on the chaise lounge and waits for Katarina's star to come out in the sky. Her star is the first one to appear in the evening sky. Kathy's mother named "Katarina's star" when Kathy was a child. Kathy would always come out to the back yard in the Summertime, and lay and wait for her star to appear. Eddie waits with her, as Mark and Paula float around in the pool. When Katarina's star appears, Kathy exclaims, "there it is! It's the first time my star came out after I graduated!" Eddie and Paula already know about Kathy's star. Paula explains Katarina's star to Mark, who has never heard the story.

They all sit around the pool until late evening, when they are about ready to crash. As Mark and Paula are getting ready to leave, Paula mentions, "with any luck, I'll be driving you home soon." Mark replies, "then I'll get out of shape, and have to work out more." Normally, Mark and Paula would just walk home, but Kathy doesn't think Paula should have to walk home on the day she graduated. Since it's late, and it has been a long day, they all decide that Eddie will drive Mark home, and Kathy will drive Paula home. Eddie and Kathy kiss goodnight for the evening. Mark and Paula do the same, and everyone heads out. They will all meet up again tomorrow.